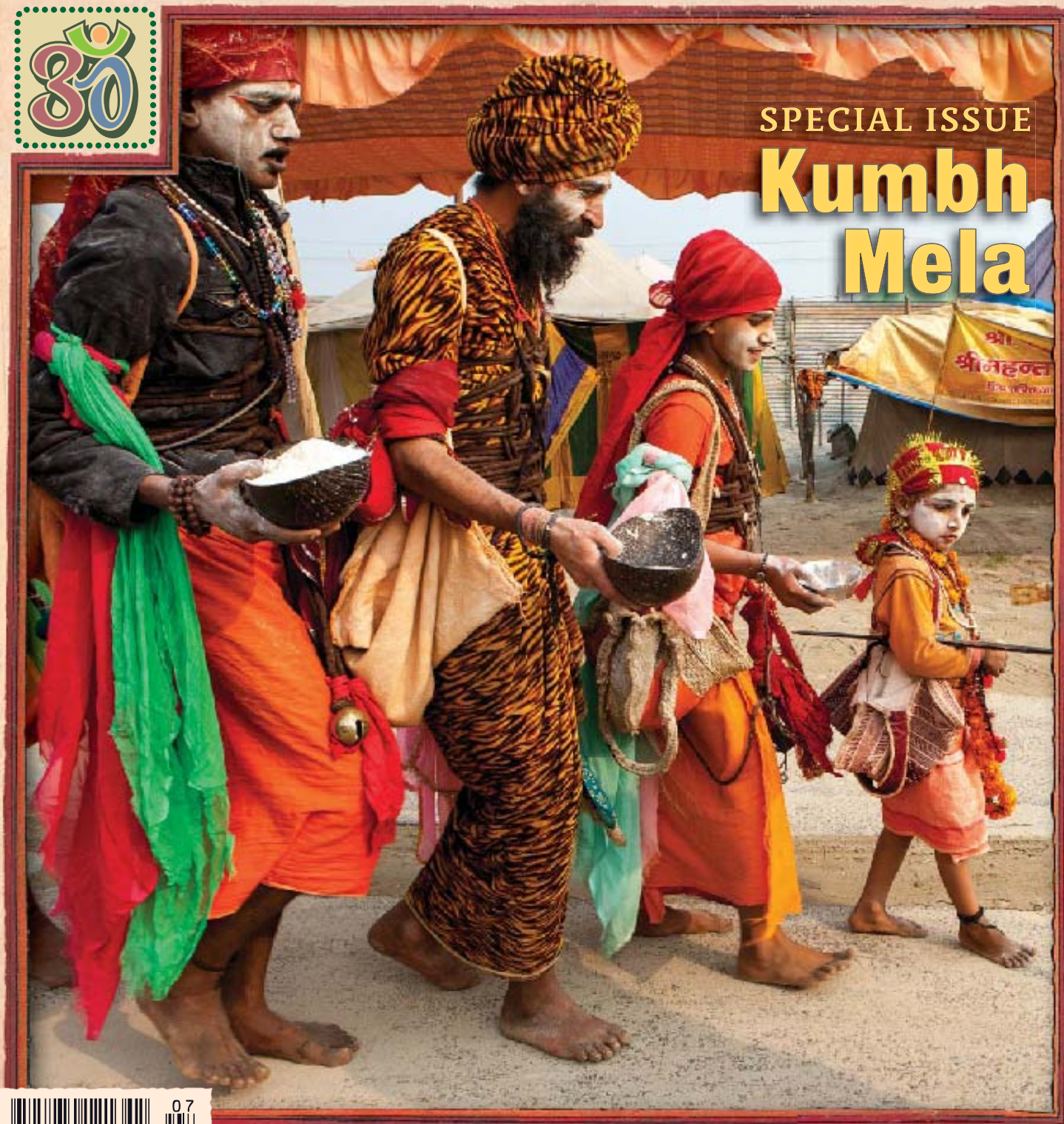


# HINDUISM

July/August/September, 2013 US\$7.95



Affirming Sanatana Dharma and Recording the Modern History of a Billion-Strong Global Religion in Renaissance



## SPECIAL ISSUE Kumbh Mela

THOMAS KELLY

BAPS SWAMINARAYAN SANSTHA



COVER: Sadhus of the Alakh Darbar Parampara roam from camp to camp begging for food and donations for the poor; the new sandstone and marble Swaminarayan Mandir near Los Angeles employs high technology to buffer it from the area's frequent earthquakes

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The above satellite image shows the entire Kumbh Mela area (outlined in red)

**The Kumbh Mela:**  
One hundred million people—30 million on February 10, 2013 alone—participated in this year’s Kumbh Mela at Prayag in India. For their story, turn to page 18



- 1. Historic Fort
- 2. Main Saints' Area
- 3. Main Pilgrim Camp Area
- 4. Bathing Ghats
- 5. Bathing Ghats
- 6. Main Bathing Ghat



# GLOBAL DHARMA

WORLD

## Tamil Trailblazers

JAPANESE SCHOLAR HIROSHI YAMASHITA recently stated in a *News East-West* interview that his studies have found Tamil Hindus, in particular, to have played a major role in the global spread of Hinduism. It seems that Tamils, finding themselves in a new country, have adapted well to their new home, while still maintaining much of their own culture and religious practices.

One key factor, he points out, is that the Tamils are responsible for the global presence of Hindu priests, having brought them from Sri Lanka and India to serve in Hindu temples around the

world.

Professor Yamashita is a leading scholar of Indian civilization and culture and the Hindu religion throughout the world. Fluent in Tamil and Sanskrit, he has an MA in Indian philosophy and a PhD in both Hinduism and Tamil literature.

Asked by Toronto-based *News East-West* about his interest in the global Hindu diaspora, Yamashita replied, "I am a student of the growth of Indian civilization from ancient times to today. Since Hinduism has grown so much overseas in recent decades, I am fascinated by its story. As I am a scholar of Tamil culture,



**Researching the Tamil diaspora:** Professor Hiroshi Yamashita and his wife (center) visit Richmond Hill Ganesh Temple in Toronto. Temple priest Sivasri Ketheeswara Kurukkal, at right, is from Sri Lanka, as are most of the temple's other six priests.

my thrust is also on the Tamil diaspora, particularly from Sri Lanka. In order to study the Tamils overseas, I have been to Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Cambodia, Vietnam, Germany and now Canada. I realized the importance of Sri Lankan and

Indian Tamils in globalizing Hinduism. They have spread out into many countries in recent decades, thus taking Hinduism with them in a big way. In fact, they have played a much bigger role than other Hindu groups in globalizing Hinduism."

## MARRIAGE

### Hindu Weddings in Hawaii?

AN UNUSUAL BUSINESS HAS taken hold right in HINDUISM TODAY's back yard, Hawaii. So many Hindu weddings are being held in the state that Honolulu's main newspaper, the *Star-Advertiser*, printed two feature stories on the phenomenon in February, 2013.

Not that many have taken place yet—just a few a month—but their scale has attracted attention in the hotel industry.

Instead of the average of 30 guests costing tens of thousands of dollars for a "destination wedding"—meaning the couple came to Hawaii just to get married and don't live here—Hindu weddings can have up to 500 guests and cost hundreds of thousands of dollars. Even couples from India are getting married here, despite the absence of rentable elephants to join the procession.



**Aloha wedding:** Hindu wedding taking place in Hawaii



**On the rise:** The Cremation Association predicts that more than 50 percent of deaths will be memorialized with cremations by 2017

## LAST RITES

### America Opts for Cremation

ACCORDING TO A SURVEY CONDUCTED by the Funeral and Memorial Information Council in 2010, cremation in the United States has increased by over 50 percent in the last 20 years. The choice of cremation over burial rose from just 15% in 1985 to 41% today. This increase is due in part to the significantly lower price of cremation over burial. One family told *The New York Times* that by opting for cremation, their expenditure dropped from between \$10,000 and

\$16,000 to just \$1,600.

One possible factor in this change was explained by Stephen Prothero, professor of religion at Boston University and author of *Purified by Fire: A History of Cremation in America*. He told the *Times*, "America is becoming 'Hinduized' in this way. We're increasingly seeing the human as essentially spiritual and gradually giving up on the Judeo-Christian idea of the person in the afterlife [which links the soul with the body]."

## BANGLADESH

### Homes, Temples Attacked

ON FEBRUARY 21, 2013, THE Bangladesh government sentenced Delwar Hossain Sayedee, vice-president of the Islamic Party, to death for war crimes committed in the 1971 independence conflict. Sayedee and other Islamic Party leaders have been charged for the party's assistance to Pakistani forces during the war, which resulted in the deaths of over three million people. After the ruling, violence erupted against the country's government and its Hindu minority, and still continues well into April. The Islamic Party considers Hindus direct supporters of the government ruling. This has resulted in the destruction of Hindu temples, shops and homes, as well as the deaths of civilians and police.

The unbridled violence against the nation's Hindus has drawn international attention. Amnesty International's Bangladesh Researcher, Abbas Faiz, stated, "The Hindu community

in Bangladesh is at extreme risk. At such a tense time in the country, it is shocking that they appear to be targeted simply for their religion. The authorities must ensure that they receive the protection they need." One anonymous survivor told Amnesty International that his family's village was set on fire by people taking part in an Islamic Party strike. "They moved into our properties and set fire to 30 of our houses. Seventy-six families were living in these homes. They also set fire to our temples, all of which have now vanished."

After gaining independence from Pakistan, Bangladesh was founded as a secular republic in 1972, but the country's founding leader, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, was soon assassinated in a 1975 military coup. The new military rulers began amending the constitution, making Islam the state religion and legalizing religious-based political parties. In 2009 the country's current secular



**Mounting tension:** Activists run while policemen fire tear gas shells during a protest rally in Dhaka on March 2, 2013

government came into power, led by Sheikh Mujib's daughter, the current Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina. Over the last few years the government has worked to break down many of the previous regime's religiously biased policies, thus fomenting resentment throughout much of the Islamic Party.

Current attempts to make party leaders answer for their past crimes have been supported

by many throughout the country. But the Islamic Party claims the government is using the war crimes tribunal to decimate their leadership and cripple their influence. Party leader Rafiqul Haq threatened, "Our backs have been pushed to the wall. If we can't stop the fascist government from holding the trials, all our main leaders will be hanged. We will die rather than let the government kill our leaders."

## FESTIVALS

### Odisha's Festival of Penance

EACH YEAR, BEGINNING IN mid-March and lasting up to 21 days, the *Danda Nata* ("penance dance") in worship of Lord Siva is observed by thousands of devotees throughout the Ganjam region of Odisha (formerly called Orissa). The festival includes one of the most ancient folk dances in this state, known for its wealth of unique art, songs and dances. Though some of these cultural forms are losing popularity in modern times, the Danda Nata is still practiced with enthusiasm and vigor as a ceremony welcoming the spring season and commencing the year's agricultural activities.

The festival itself is an act of penance to Lord Siva. It is a strong statement of self-control and self-denial during which devotees pray for blessings. The participants—all males—are known as Bhoktas. These men

fast in preparation and take 13 vows which last for the 21 days, including strict vegetarianism and bramacharya. The lead Bhokta of each group lives on fruit juice, while others eat one simple meal a day, often plain rice cooked by themselves. They are required to eat in natural surroundings, away from human activity. If they hear even a single human voice, they are expected to end their eating for the day. Because of this, many will drown out sounds by beating drums continually through their meal.

The festival's activities are in three main phases. They include the Dhuli Danda (earth penance), the Pani Danda (water penance) and the Danda Nata itself, comprising theatrical, dance and musical performances.

Throughout the first half of each day, as the hot sun heats



**Seeking Siva's grace:** In this penance, participants perform aerobic feats on the scorching earth, here they lay on thorns with a heavy board laying across them

the earth, participants perform exhausting dance and aerobic exercises, mostly representing farming activities—ploughing, cultivation and harvesting. The participants travel in a procession, along with musicians, to various villages and stop in front of homes and crowds.

By the afternoon they begin

the Pani Danda, trekking to nearby bodies of water to perform aquatic feats, forming human pyramids and swimming to the rhythms of music played from the shore. In the evening the participants begin the traditional, all-night Danda Nata, dancing and singing simultaneously.



## White House Yoga Garden

THIS YEAR, PRESIDENT BARACK Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama have once again included a Yoga Garden as part of the White House "Easter Egg Roll," an annual event which hosts 30,000 participants. The Yoga Garden, blooming since 2009, invites professional instructors from around the country to teach yoga to children and adults in attendance. Michelle Obama—a yoga practitioner herself—began the event, stating, "Let's roll some eggs and do some yoga!"

Yoga instructor Leah Cullis has been conducting the Yoga

Garden each year. She told the *Times of India*, "The mission of the event is to share ways where families and children can use simple tools for an active lifestyle, tools that require no props and no money, so that they can go home and do it themselves."

This year's theme was "Be Healthy, Be Active, Be You!" Activities were aligned with Michelle's *Let's Move* initiative, a national effort to combat childhood obesity. Children also had classes about nutrition and seasonal eating, including choosing fresh produce in a farmer's market.

The instructors received a



**Quite a stretch:** Led by professional instructors, children and adults spend the day doing yoga on the White House lawn

special visit from Michelle towards the end of the day. When leaving the Yoga Garden, she put

her palms together, bowed her head, and acknowledged everyone with "Namaste."

## HISTORY

### India-Australia DNA Link

A RECENT ABORIGINAL GENE-alogy study, published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, states that Australia likely experienced a wave of migration from India 4,000 years ago. By tracking genetic markers within DNA, researchers found a substantial amount of genetic associations

between Indians and native Australians. In looking at fossils and archaeological discoveries dating to this period, researchers deduced that changes in technology and the introduction of new animals may be attributed to this group of Indians. Professor Stoneking, one of the authors of the study, concluded from



**Dingos:** Scientists have long speculated that the native Australian dingo was more closely related to domestic dogs than wolves

their findings, "It is strongly suggestive that microlith tools,

dingos and the movement of people were all connected."

## BRIEFLY...

### THE INTERNATIONAL POLICY

*Digest* gave a troubling report in January, 2013, that more than 350 Hindu temples were destroyed during Sri Lanka's civil war; most were in areas with a Tamil majority. In some cases, Buddhist shrines have been built on the sites.

### ACCORDING TO A RECENT SURVEY

by *Gallup*, the United States is still the most popular global destination for emigrating peoples. In India, over 10 million people would like to acquire permanent residency in the States, placing it 3rd behind China's 22 million and Nigeria's 15 million. *Gallup* stated that the reason so many people are

wishing to leave their land of origin for the US is the simple search for opportunity, whether in starting a new business, expressing one's views without fear or living where they can better provide for their children.

### MANY HINDUS IN THE UK ARE

concerned about mislabeled meat products. In one report, a third of Scottish Indian restaurants were found to be serving beef, which is cheaper, instead of lamb in their dishes. This has been an upsetting deception for nonvegetarian Hindus who avoid beef. Anil Bhanot, managing director of Hindu Council UK told *India Today*, "Our estimates are that two-thirds

of Hindus based in the UK are meat eaters, and it is important they know what is being served to them." Hindu groups have called on the government to enforce stricter source disclosure regulations for meat.

### HINDU TEMPLES THROUGHOUT

Malaysia are facing priest shortages. The country's immigration department is only granting visas for one or two priests per temple from India. This has created many cases where 5,000 or 10,000 devotees have only one priest.

### THE CENTER FOR JAIN STUDIES AT

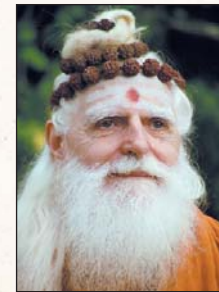
Claremont Lincoln University in California has initiated a program which sends fifty K-12 teachers to receive an in-depth summer education in nonvio-

lence through their interaction with people who live nonviolent lives. These include teachers, business people, medical practitioners, community leaders, students and more. As part of their education, the teachers explore meditation and contemplative spiritual practices.

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and lineages; 2. To inform and inspire Hindus worldwide and people interested in Hinduism; 3. To dispel myths, illusions and misinformation about Hinduism; 4. To protect, preserve and promote the sacred *Vedas* and the Hindu religion; 5. To nurture and monitor the ongoing spiritual Hindu renaissance; 6. To publish resources for Hindu leaders and educators who promote Sanatana Dharma. Join this *seva* by sending letters, clippings, photographs, reports on events and by encouraging others.



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## IN MY OPINION

# God's the Answer

Our Hindu concept of the devotee's evolving search for Truth is the key to world harmony

BY NITHIN SRIDHAR

THE BASIC PHILOSOPHY of nearly every religion relies on accepting the existence of God; that of atheism relies on rejecting such existence. There have been lengthy debates regarding whether God exists, and if so, what constitutes God. Is God one or many, God or god?

In contrast, the Hindu religion includes many such belief systems. At one extreme, Hindu monotheists claim one absolute God, separate from the world; at the other extreme, Hindu polytheists accept a multiplicity of Gods, Goddesses and demigods. There are also Hindu monists, who claim the presence of "Only God," denying any separation between world and God. Hinduism has always accommodated all of these apparently divergent viewpoints as part of a coherent and all-embracing philosophy of life. This inclusiveness is possible because there is an inherent awareness in our religion that every person is ultimately on the same path, seeking the same goal. In the words of Vivekananda, "Man is not traveling from error to truth, but climbing up from truth to truth, from truth that is lower to truth that is higher." This simple truth finds its greatest expression in our understanding of the Deity and our worship.

Our concept of Deity is a unique contribution from Hinduism to the whole world, not only in terms of theological and spiritual value but also in the promotion of world harmony. In simple words, any person can connect with God in whatever way he is inclined to. This worldview completely removes any basis for religious intolerance.

The power from the Deity is completely dependent upon the devotee's sincerity and individual worship. Any two people might approach the Deity in very different ways. Some may feel the Deity to be Nirguna-Nirakara Brahman, formless and absolute. For others, the Deity may be a manifestation



of this formless God. For some, the Deity is only one aspect of the Absolute, such as Vishnu, the Preserver. Some may worship the forces of nature, such as Agni or Vayu, while others worship the Atman.

A Deity can be God, or one of the Gods—or both, or neither—depending upon what the devotee seeks. The Deity-devotee relationship is an intimate connection dependent on

spiritual clarity and mental earnestness. The more love a devotee has, the closer he is to the Deity and the clearer his understanding of the universe. The devotee perceives the Deity according to his limited perspective and inclinations and projects this limited perception on the limitless God. Thus God projects back to the devotee a limited and relatable form. As a devotee gets closer to the Deity, his mind becomes purer and his perception less limited.

Sandhya Vandana, Sun worship, illustrates this concept. At first glance it appears to be a simple prayer to the Sun who gives warmth and light to Earth, a show of gratitude towards nature. At a deeper level it can be understood as worship of the entire cosmos, which at every moment is changing, evolving and dissolving. Deeper still, it is a prayer to all of existence, the source and energy that manifests the whole. Ultimately it is worship of the Inner Self, the essential core, present within the smallest particle and within the greatest galaxy.

As a devotee proceeds from his limited understanding of God into a direct experience of limitless Truth, he gains insight into a God who is formless and yet who manifests in an infinite number of forms. This insight into the nature of cosmic truth and its infinite expressions is the very foundation of the all-embracing and tolerant way of life that Hindu Dharma propounds.

NITHIN SRIDHAR, 25, of Mysore, Karnataka, writes on society and spirituality.



# God of Fear/God of Love

Love is the basis of worship in all Hindu denominations, expressed through bhakti yoga toward one's chosen Deity

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

ON A RECENT TEACHING JOURNEY I MET Ravindran, who was raised in India but had lived in the West for many years. He was openly grappling with lingering questions about beliefs he learned while growing up. He shared that Hindus in his region feared that if they didn't regularly and properly propitiate the Deities of their village, the Gods and Goddesses would be upset, and this would cause negative events in their life. Thus, they were kept busy appeasing a multiplicity of Deities that had been worshiped for generations. The premise of this type of worship is fear, specifically that if we lapse in our ritual obligations we will be punished, or we will suffer, in some way.

I assured Ravindran that the great Gods of Hinduism do not live in a consciousness of wrath, hurtfulness, judgment, retaliation or pettiness. They are beings of love and light, showering their blessings on each of us, regardless of our failings, frailties and omissions. With this belief as its cornerstone, Hinduism is a joy-based religion in which one never need fear God, never worry that God will be offended or exact some punishment if we do not perfectly perform our puja. Worship in its highest sense is an outpouring of love. God is love and nothing but love.

My Gurudeva, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, affirmed: "Hinduism is such a joyous religion, freed of all the mental encumbrances that are prevalent in the various Western faiths. It is freed of the notion of a vengeful God. It is freed of the notion of eternal suffering. It is freed from the notion of original sin. It is freed from the notion of a single spiritual path, a One Way."

Ravindran told me more about his village's belief. When negative events occurred, such as a death of a child, a flood or a sudden illness, the elders looked for lapses in the mandatory rites, believing that the Deities must be penalizing them for neglecting some aspect of the worship. He hoped that a better understanding of the nature of the Gods would help overcome such superstition.

Hindu philosophy teaches that all events in our life, be they positive or negative, are the result of actions we performed in past lives. A distressing situation is a self-created misfortune, not a punishment from God. Life itself, taking place within the realm of duality, is a playground of natural forces, a classroom for embodied souls to experience joy and sorrow, elation and depression, success and failure, health and sickness, good times and bad. The divine beings who reside in the deeper realms of consciousness are always there to assist embodied souls in their journey through samsara. Puja rituals are performed not to propitiate them or mollify their wrath, but to adore them and invoke their blessings and guidance.

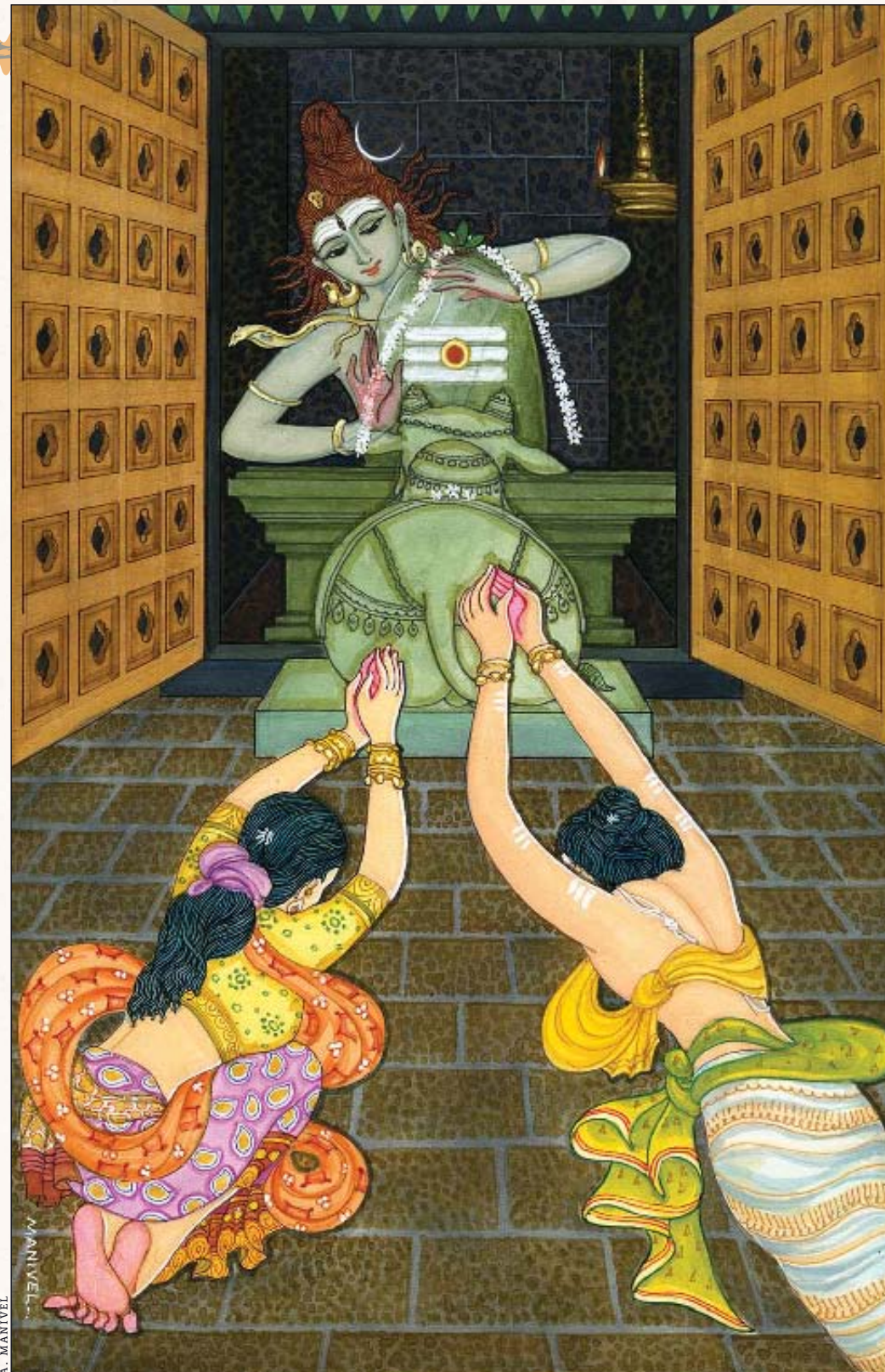


Ritual appeasement does have a scriptural purpose, to protect against the negative energies and efforts of astral entities who actually do seek to upset the lives of embodied souls. Gurudeva taught that the best way to guard against such malevolent beings is to build a positive spiritual force field by invoking the protection of higher and more powerful benevolent beings—the Gods of Hinduism. Astral entities are powerless where there is harmony, cleanliness and close communion with the Gods and their devas.

On that same journey a teenage boy, leaning forward in earnest, asked, "Do I have to worship all the Deities in the temple, or can I focus on just Lord Ganesha? I am finding that by keeping a singular focus I am getting much closer to Him. I'm beginning to form a connection that I've never had with any of the other Deities."

I replied in the affirmative, that it is fine to focus on just one Deity. In fact, this is the pattern followed by most Hindus. However, it is only fitting to honor and acknowledge all the Divinities when in the temple. I shared, "When attending puja to another Deity, worship sincerely and show deep respect; but you need not strive to feel as close to that Deity as you do to Lord Ganesha."

In Sanskrit, the Deity of one's most pious attention is called *Ishta Devata*, literally, "cherished or chosen Deity." Vaishnavas may choose among many Divine forms: Vishnu, Balaji, Krishna, Radha, Rama, Lakshmi, Hanuman and Narasimha, as well as the Shaligrama (a black-colored fossil found in the sacred river Gandaki). Smartas traditionally choose their *Ishta* from among six Deities: Siva, Shakti, Vishnu, Surya, Ganesha and Kumara (or any of their traditional forms). Shaktas, who worship the Divine as the Goddess Shakti, may focus on one among Her many forms, from the furious Kali to the benign and graceful Parvati or Ambika. Saivites direct their worship primarily to Siva, as represented by the Sivalinga, Nataraja and Ardhanarishvara. Many Saivites choose Lord Karttikeya, also known as Murugan or Skanda, as their *Ishta Devata*. My Gurudeva, a staunch Saivite, taught us to worship Siva as the Supreme God while starting with the worship of Lord Ganesha, who is "the closest God to the material plane of consciousness, most easily contacted and most able to assist us in our day-to-day life and concerns."



An analogy to friends is helpful. Teenagers have many friends, but it is common to have one best friend with whom we share the most intimate and personal details of our life. Having an *Ishta Devata* is like that, and the feeling we should have toward that Divinity is the same as the feeling we have for our best friend. Holding a singular focus helps us to draw closer and closer to that Deity.

Another approach to understanding the Deity's compassionate nature, and in the process ridding oneself of any lingering fear, is to

**Worship based on love:** Two devotees, husband and wife, prostrate before Lord Siva in total surrender, or *prapatti*. Their love of God brings them into a profound proximity to the Divine.

think of the God or Goddess as the parent and ourselves as the child. In fact, the Deity is the perfect parent, because no matter what we do, He/She always sends us blessings and love. When we make mistakes, He never becomes angry or punishes us. The Deity's love is perfect love, existing at all times, in all circumstances for all souls. In developing a closeness with the Deity, we eventually discover and bask in that perfect love. The *Tirumantiram* affirms this idea: "The ignorant foolishly say that love and Siva are two, but none of them knows that love alone is Siva. When men know that love and Siva are the same, love as Siva they ever remain."

In giving talks on the topic of love of God, I often share the similarity of the Vaishnava and Saiva concepts. In the Chaitanya school of Vaishnavism, for example, bhakti is seen as progressing through five stages: neutrality toward God, servitude to God, friendship with God, parental feelings for God, and relating to God as a lover to the beloved. Saivism expresses a parallel concept. The first stage is called the *dasa margā*, "path of servitude," with the soul relating to God as servant to master. In the second stage, *satputra margā*, our relationship is as a child to his parents. In the third stage, *sakha margā*, God is like a friend. In the fourth stage of maturity, called *san margā*, or "true path," God is our dearest beloved. Both denominations emphasize the soul's coming ever closer to God, in stages that begin with bhakti yoga, which leads the devotee to an intense love of God. Some common bhakti practices are:

- ❖ **shravana:** Listening to sacred texts and stories of God.
- ❖ **kirtana:** Singing devotional hymns and bhajans.
- ❖ **smarana:** Remembering the presence and name of the Divine. This includes mantra repetition.
- ❖ **pada-sevana:** Service to the holy feet, which includes serving humanity.
- ❖ **archana:** Attending ritual worship in the temple and attending or conducting worship in one's home shrine.
- ❖ **vandana:** Prostrating to the Deity.
- ❖ **atma-nivedana:** Complete self-surrender.

Bhakti yoga develops qualities that make communion possible, such as love, selflessness and purity, leading to self-effacement and surrender to God. It is in this idea of the need for surrender, *prapatti*, that the members of all sects merge in oneness. We know that we have attained *prapatti* when we effortlessly know that everything that happens is due to the grace of God and not our own actions. There is no trace of fear in this mode of worship.

In a letter he wrote to a young man, our paramaguru, Yogaswami (1872–1964), explained the unitive perspective to be held not only toward God, but toward everything.

"I am with you and you are with me. There is no distance between us. I am you. You are I. What is there to fear? Look! I exist as you. Then what must you do? You must love. Whom? Everyone. To speak more clearly, your very nature is love. Not only you, but all are pervaded by love. But there is no 'all,' for you alone exist. All are you!"



# California's First Quake-Ready Stone Temple



Modern technology, community outreach and volunteerism turned the dream of building a traditional Swaminarayan mandir in Los Angeles into a reality

**H**IS DIVINE HOLINESS PRAMUKH swami Maharaj, fifth spiritual successor of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and present leader of Bochasanwasi Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS), visited the Golden State for the first time in 1977. He attended satsangs of his San Francisco devotees and encouraged a small group in Los Angeles to hold regular satsang as well. He and the senior sadhus of his monastic order returned nearly every year, nurturing and inspiring devotees throughout California and the Western US. In 1984 Swamishri, as he is affectionately called, inaugurated a small center in Whittier.

Fast forward to 1996: Leaders of the Southern California group made a proposal to build a larger facility, including a traditional stone mandir, to fulfill a vision that Swamishri had shared with them almost two decades earlier and to accommodate their growing congregation. With his blessings, they began searching for land. At Swamishri's next visit,

in 2000, they enlisted his vision and wealth of experience building mandirs, asking for guidance regarding the half dozen parcels they were considering. He guided them to select a plot right next to Highway 71 in the city of Chino Hills. With this thrust from their guru, the group successfully acquired the land and obtained all the necessary permits, studies and approvals to build the mandir and ten other buildings—a process that proved much more arduous and lengthy than they had anticipated.

## Vertically Challenged

After several years of working toward approval, the temple's development team ran into a major snag. Pujya Viratswarup Swami, a monk involved in the planning, explains that the *shikharas* (towers) for a temple of this size should rise to 78 feet. The local zoning allowed a religious facility, but there was a height restriction of 42 feet. "We had thought there was a variance for architectural features, but we were mistaken. That

applied to other zones—not this one."

Asked again for guidance, Swamishri instructed them to make their application anyway and request a variance. The city officials and staff had been helpful throughout the planning stages, and in 2004 the planning commission recommended that the city council adopt the variance. But then opposition arose. Viratswarup Swami laments, "I think there was a misunderstanding. They may have envisioned 78-foot blocks of stone rising all over the place. As you can see, this one spire, one flagpole, one tip is 78 feet; everything else is well below that."

The city council decided to allow BAPS to build the ten buildings surrounding the mandir but refused to change the height restriction.

Discouraged, the group asked Swamishri if they should move on and try to find a less restrictive place to build. He kept a positive attitude and encouraged them to press on in Chino Hills. He explained it would be better to continue, to connect with the people,

rather than walk away and leave them with misconceptions about Hinduism, Hindus in general or BAPS in particular.

Strengthened by their guru's words and their dedication to make his vision a reality, the sishyas made progress on the other buildings while continuing to pursue the height variance for the mandir. Swamishri followed their progress closely from India, having the transcripts of every hearing translated into Gujarati and read to him.

The sishyas realized the importance of staying and explaining who they were to their neighbors and friends, Viratswarup Swami relates. "Volunteers ventured out to city and community events, speaking to people in person and on the telephone. They held 13 open houses over the years in which people from the community were invited to the campus to mix and have lunch. These gatherings proved instrumental to our success.

"As we built these facilities," Swami adds, "we learned how to better communicate with the community, share our experiences, share who we are, how we are part of this community in Chino Hills—that it's the place we call home, too. We presented to the community what the temple is, what exactly we were asking for, what we do here. The support was just tremendous."

In 2011, at the hearing about the height variance application, devotees were overwhelmed by the turnout of residents of all backgrounds from around the city. "They were all there in support of what we were doing, and I think the council saw that clearly," Swami recalls.

During the hearing process, two children from the congregation wrote a letter to the city council and planning commission expressing why the mandir was so important to them. Ronak Patel, a lawyer who helped coordinate many aspects of the project, shares

one of their stories: "A twelve-year-old boy had learned in school about the detrimental health effects of tobacco. He had always wished his father would overcome his addiction to tobacco. In the letter he explains what this mandir has taught him, what Hinduism has taught him, what Swamishri's message of non-addiction and devotion to God has taught him, and how that can impact his life. He concluded that the mandir would have a very beneficial impact on families and related that while volunteering during the construction of the temple he was able to take the message he heard and convince his father to stop his addiction to tobacco."

Bharatsinh Zala, a senior devotee, adds,



"One of the commissioners mentioned during the hearing how inspiring this letter was, that it brought tears to his eyes. A city council member made a similar comment."

Strong support also came from Leonard Scarcella, mayor of Stafford, Texas, the Houston suburb where BAPS opened its first traditional stone mandir in the US in 2004. He told HINDUISM TODAY, "What I've personally observed for well over a decade now has been the tremendous devotion that these people have to their families, the

**Done deed:** (clockwise from far left) Some of the thousands of devotees attending the temple's inaugural ceremonies line up for darshan following the murti pratishtha; the base isolators that protect the temple from the shaking ground below; solar panels over the main parking area provide shade as a bonus; Pramukh Swami Maharaj (center) with devotees in Southern California in the 1970s

community, their temple and their religious beliefs." Responding to a request from one of his constituents, he wrote to the Chino Hills city council encouraging them to allow the height variance.

The mayor of Chino Hills phoned Scarcella to learn more about the effects the Stafford temple had on that community. Scarcella recalls, "I explained the situation related to the traffic, the building, but most importantly the perception that I've carried with me about the culture of the Hindu people and their strong beliefs, their strong commitment and their extremely strong desire to be productive citizens of the city and the community, always trying to move the city and the public towards its goal. I told him of our experience here and how positive a factor the Hindus had been, and that he should not sell

short the tremendous asset that the Hindu people could be in his city."

Despite the delays and the city council's stance on the height variance, Pramukh Swami Maharaj advised his devotees to move forward confidently and build the sandstone mandir. Ultimately, the request was granted, and the structure was completed in 2012. Viratswarup Swami reflects, "I grew up in this country. You learn a lot and read a lot about concepts of equality and freedom. I think this temple is a monument to those concepts



PHOTOS COURTESY BAPS SWAMINARAYAN SANSTHA







and to the fact that in America a minority religious group can come to a community and find not just acceptance but excitement. I think this is a great moment for this community, this state, this country.”

### Technologically Enhanced

California is seismically active, and the greater Los Angeles area is located in Seismic Zone 4, the most severe. Therefore, this temple could not be built as it would have been in low-risk parts of India. Where there is high risk of earthquake damage, a stone temple is dangerous: the violent shaking could cause beams and pillars to crack and stones to come apart. A unique structural design was required to ensure the stability of the temple and the safety of the worshipers.

Jagdish Patel, a construction manager for the California Department of Transportation, is a member of the congregation. His expert volunteer help was invaluable in nearly every aspect of the design and construction. He relates, “The foundation was designed as a mat, three feet thick and covering the entire footprint of the temple. It is reinforced with #9 fiberglass rebar, which is 1-1/8” in diameter. We used fiberglass so that if water penetrates the foundation or footing concrete and the concrete ever cracks, the water will not react with the rebar. Thus the bonding between the concrete and the rebar will stay intact for years to come. And wherever the bar had to be bent, we used stainless steel, for the same reason of minimizing corrosion from water.” The life of typical concrete is about one hundred years. By using non-rusting rebar and a special concrete formula, they achieved a foundation with a projected lifespan of 500 to 1,000 years.

The unique design doesn’t stop at the foundation. “This temple is basically a big, thick, stone veneer,” Jagdish continues. “Twelve-inch concrete walls carry the seismic forces. Each stone is connected vertically and horizontally with surrounding stones, and horizontally back to the concrete wall with copper clamps. We used copper for less corrosiveness and long life.”

Between the foundation and the temple are 40 base isolators—perhaps the most significant structural feature that makes it possible to erect stone mandirs in earthquake zones. These are columns containing metal discs in viscous fluid, encased in rubber. Jagdish explains, “The isolators dissipate the energy, absorbing 80–90 percent of the horizontal seismic forces for the structure above. The stone and concrete walls have the capacity to withstand the remaining forces.” When the ground shakes, the base isolators allow the entire structure above to move as a single unit from two to four feet in all directions horizontally, giving the ability to withstand earthquakes rated up to 8.5 on the Richter scale. This is critically important due to the temple’s proximity to the nearest fault line. “We’re actually on it,” Jagdish emphasized. “There is an active fault going through Chino Hills.”

While the seismic activity in Southern California presented a challenge, its location in the Sun Belt offered a tremendous opportunity. “We were looking for an alternate energy solution,” Jagdish shared, “because this property will have a total of 11 buildings and lot of activities, plus a large parking lot requiring a lot of lights at night. So we talked to Synergy,” a company that consults on energy efficiency and installs alternative production solutions. The decisions to cover the wide-open parking area and to build those covers out of solar panels went hand-in-hand, resulting in dual-purpose structures that generate a total of 500 kilowatts. “This will provide sufficient energy for

**Job well done:** (from the top) Father and son celebrate during the Nagar Yatra, the parade through the community that was part of several days of opening activities; arati is offered to Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Gunatitanand Swami; Leonard Scarcella, Mayor of Stafford, Texas, presents Sadguru Pujya Bhaktipriya Swami, the senior BAPS sadhu who officiated at the mandir’s inauguration, with a commendation for the City of Chino Hills; construction manager Jagdish Patel (left) with members of the building team



all 11 buildings,” he continued. In India, BAPS does use solar for incidental electricity needs at many of its facilities. But this project has prompted them to evaluate opportunities for solar self-sufficiency at their other North American mandirs.

Local electricity production is not the only green principle being applied. A giant skylight provides natural lighting for the haveli (gathering hall), and Solatubes channel natural light into the rooms of many of the other buildings. The mandir itself is lit solely by low-consumption LEDs. The entire campus sets an example for ecological responsibility, demonstrating how to plan for future energy independence and long-term cost savings. Ronak comments, “Initially, there may be additional costs necessary to install the solar facilities, but the benefit to the environment, which is of utmost importance, is significant.”

### Sweat Equity

The community attending this center for weekly worship is relatively small, just 200–250 families. Those families were the major source of funds to build the facility, with some support from devotees at smaller temples throughout California and the Western US who plan to come once or twice a year

for major events. For such a small group of donors to successfully complete a project

of this magnitude required sacrifice. Ronak remarks, “When you see people not buying a new car, not buying furniture for their home, kids not going out to eat, not going to a movie, not buying new clothes, when their parents invite them shopping and they say no, they want to give the money to the temple, that is inspiring.”

The financial contributions were significantly supplemented by volunteer labor from devotees of all ages. Jagdish Patel, for example, came daily after work, often working until the middle of the night. Youth helped after school and on weekends in every way they could, be it cleaning up the abundant marble dust from the carving work or setting pavers. “They would do it with such enthusiasm and joy, really putting their hearts into it,” noted Bharatsinh.

Children were as generous with their money as with their time. “Ghanshyam Maharaj is the *balswarup* (childhood form) of Bhagwan Swaminarayan,” explained Viratswarup Swami. (An image of Him takes a prominent place in the mandir.) “The youth wanted to sponser the murti, so they saved money by not buying new video games; they took summer jobs and cut their personal expenses.” This has built an ownership of the

**Architecture:** Stunning is the level of detail and refined craftsmanship in the LED-lit ornate marble interior of the mandir; (inset) illuminated mostly by a giant skylight, the woodwork in the haveli, a multi-function cultural center next to the mandir, astounds the unsuspecting visitor

temple in the young people, and a pride that they can say they were responsible for this image of God to which they most closely relate.

Swami relates a story that expresses how the volunteers have impacted the community around them. Swami relates, “During our open houses, we met a kind couple named Martha and Carlos. When we first met Carlos, he had just a general understanding of Hinduism and wanted to learn more. He began reading a few books here about Hinduism, learning about the faith a little at a time. As the process with the city council moved forward, we occasionally spoke with him, and he gave us some tips and offered to help us with whatever we needed. He was a strong supporter. But at the end of the process he said something incredible, and I think this represents the story of the mandir. He said, ‘My faith is that I’m an atheist. That’s what I believe in. But when I see your volunteers, I see God in them.’”



## LETTERS

### Swamiji Writes

This letter is to express our most sincere appreciation for having giving a comprehensive and wide coverage about our Sree Siddhaganga Gurukula in your esteemed magazine, HINDUISM TODAY, in the article entitled "Karnataka's Magnanimous Math" (Apr/May/June 2013). We particularly thank Smt. Choodamani Shivaram, correspondent in Bangalore for the successful and nice article she wrote for the magazine. This was possible because of her visit to our holy math and meetings with people here. We do hope that the publication of such articles will certainly go on in a big way in realization of the noble objective of your magazine, to uphold the Hindu tradition. We value your association with us. Thank you.

SREE SREE SIDDALINGASWAMIGALU  
SREE SIDDAGANGA MATH  
KARNATAKA, INDIA

### Thank You

As a long-time subscriber of HINDUISM TODAY, I'm very happy to see the evolution from the paper, to the present glossy, colorful magazine. I anxiously wait for the next issue, as each one is a treasure house of fascinating articles on Hinduism practiced throughout the world. As a practicing Veerashaivite, reading the comprehensive narrations of the feature articles, which covered the two magnanimous Lingayath Mutts, Siddhaganga and Suttur in the present issue and the July 2012 issue, brought back happy memories of my childhood. I wish to thank you for the beautiful pictures, illustrations and detailed explanations on each subject. Best wishes.

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### Amarnath Pilgrimage

It was such a fascinating experience to read the lucid and detailed report of the Amarnath Yatra (Apr/May/June 2013). The spirit of Rajiv Malik's writing makes the reader a part of the holy, death-defying journey, encompassing all the devotion, enthusiasm, pain, fear and frustration. Without stepping a foot outside, we experienced every emotion that the writer and photographer felt. After reading the article, I was both mentally elevated and exhausted at the same time. I salute them.

It is sad to note the poor relationship existing between the locals and the Indian paramilitary forces. Denying food at most of the bhandaras to the ponywallas, palanquin carriers and helpers is very unfortunate and probably leads to more alienation and resentment towards India. This practice should be changed. Considering the seasonal nature of yatra, one would think the services of all

associated helpers should adhere to fixed fares. This would greatly avoid ill feelings developing between pilgrims and helpers at the very onset of the journey.

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### A Licensed Profession?

There is a movement among the ayurvedic professional community in the United States to have ayurveda accepted as a licensed profession. This would allow states to monitor and standardize care and provide a means by which ayurveda may be easily accessed by the public. There are possible benefits, but have the costs been evaluated? I believe the biggest risk of seeking licensure for ayurveda is its potential secularization. Ayurveda originates from the Vedas and is therefore Hindu, though I recognize it has been adopted and contributed to by other religious movements. The *vaidya* (ayurvedic practitioner) may, in one way, be looked at as a sort of priest, who maintains the temple-bodies of the community and guides them in honoring the Agni within. As the main goal of ayurveda is to preserve and prepare the various *doshas* of the individual so that they may properly perform their dharma, resolve karma and ultimately seek the Self, it is best kept under the jurisdiction and guidance of Hinduism.

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### Predatory Proselytism

I read *Hindu Press International's* recently posted article, "Hindu Obituaries and Christian Proselytization" (3/25/2013). I felt the need to write and apologize for such insensitive treatment. I am not, myself, Christian, nor do I belong to a faith that believes in actively seeking out converts. However, what I read disturbed me so much that I wanted to extend a hand and express solidarity. The writer of the article was extremely fair in his summary; I would have been much less patient. I think that it is very important for the recognition and respect of different religions that we voice our dislike of practices such as those mentioned in the article. There is a significant difference between educative exposure and the opportunistic proselytization that the author's family experienced. The more that we understand each other and the more positive our experiences of each other are, the more likely it is that we can foster cooperation and appreciation among religious groups. Nothing good will ever come of the disrespect that is an undeniable aspect of unsolicited attempts at conversion. I find it particularly distasteful

that the author's family was approached deliberately at a time of grief and vulnerability.

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### Temple Cleanliness

As a devout Hindu who believes in pilgrimage, I was fortunate to visit several renowned temples in India, and my journey to the holy places was extremely beneficial and exciting. I managed to take a close look of the revered temples Deities and felt so blessed. Though I could not spend much time praying or meditating as it was a rush at every prominent temple, I was able to pay close attention to the architecture, design, cleanliness and overall ambience of each one I visited. My overall observation is that temples are paying more attention to the rituals and the ceremonies than to the overall, holistic cleanliness. The Deities are bathed duly, the floors are swept and the drains are cleaned, but the walls, ceilings and paintings never get much attention. The overall look and feel in almost every temple is a matter of great concern for every Hindu.

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### Hinduism in Fiji

I need your help to restore Hinduism in Fiji. I was born there, but now live in America. There is a temple in every Hindu village in Fiji and a school which is run by a South Indian organization called Fiji Sangam. I have read Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami's book *Loving Ganesa*, and I read each issue of HINDUISM TODAY. I am now reading *Living with Siva*. I want these teachings from Gurudeva to reach into Fiji through the Fiji Sangam. The main thing missing in Fiji is the purpose of the temple. Everyone goes to the temple but does not know why. If HINDUISM TODAY and *Loving Ganesa* can be distributed to schools there, it will change the lives Fiji's people. With help like this, the Hindu religion can be made stronger. A lot of people are changing their religion to Christianity because they are paid money or helped by the Christian people, and in return must change their religion. It's just like in India. Please help our people and our religion in Fiji.

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### Temple Statues

I frequent a Shri Subramaniam temple here in Malaysia. In 2009, the temple underwent repairs and the age-old shrines were replaced due to damages. The temple management was authorised to throw the old statues in

the sea according to written advice from Sivachariyars and stapatis from India and Sri Lanka. I have ask for an injunction and have placed these shrines in the temple library museum along with bells, brass ware, photos and other historical archives. I need your advice and guidance to support my efforts and continue.

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According to Agamic scholar S.P. Sabharathnam, the Agamas direct that damaged images should be disposed with due rituals in a flowing river or the ocean. But, he advises, there is nothing wrong in collecting such items and keeping them safely in a museum. Such museum, however, should be outside the temple precincts. Under no circumstance should deformed or mutilated images be used for personal or public worship. Photos and manuscripts may be kept in the temple library or in a personal library.

### Treatment of Animals

The article, "Animals Have Souls and Feelings, Just Like We Do" (Apr/May/June 2013), was thought-provoking and touching. I loved learning about animals that experience

emotion, communicate and use tools. Today's conditions are terrible. Millions of animals endure pain and suffering across the world. They are treated like machines. Mahatma Gandhi once said, "One can measure the greatness of a nation and its moral progress by the way it treats its animals." Leading a cruelty-free lifestyle, such as being vegan, is a great way to end the suffering and pain of millions of animals.

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### Improving Hindu Resources

I've been an avid reader of HINDUISM TODAY for the last 16 years of my 24-year life, and I've recently taken to writing articles on Hinduism for a small website. Something I have been wondering has to do with HINDUISM TODAY's commitment to enlightening our surrounding society. I feel that your organization has done a massive amount for creating materials and resources that make the philosophy of Sanatana Dharma more accessible to myself and to my Canadian friends. However, the one obstacle I continuously meet with when trying to promote an understanding of Hinduism is people referencing and quoting flawed Wikipedia articles.

I would urge your acharyas to examine these articles that generally portray an antiquated and, often inaccurate version of Hinduism.

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### Corrections

In "After 150 Years, the Voice of Vivekananda Still Resounds" (Jan/Feb/Mar 2013), Author Huston Smith's book on comparative religion was incorrectly titled as The Illustrated World's Religions. The correct title is simply The World's Religions.

In the caption on the gatefold image of Parvathy Baul (Jan/Feb/Mar 2013), Rashmi Sahi's name is incorrectly printed as Rashmi Sahai.

Letters with writer's name, address and daytime phone number should be sent to:

Letters, Hinduism Today  
107 Kaholalele Road  
Kapaa, Hawaii, 96746-9304 USA  
or faxed to: (808) 822-4351  
or visit: [www.hinduismtoday.com/letters](http://www.hinduismtoday.com/letters)

Letters may be edited for space and clarity and may appear in electronic versions of HINDUISM TODAY.

## Giving to the World's Grandchildren

### How to help disseminate wisdom and harmony

IT HURTS US TO SEE SO MUCH CONVERSION going on," Dr. Narendra Utukuri shared with our Hinduism Today staff upon returning from India. "They bribe them to convert and then teach them intolerance, trading a faith that respects other faiths for one that teaches intolerance! It is urgent to spread the knowledge, and we are grateful to see Hinduism Today picking up the challenge."

Dr. Utukuri is a professor of electrical engineering and math at DeVry University in Texas. His wife Malathi is a retired accountant who hails from a family of Sanskrit and Telugu scholars. "What the world needs today," she adds, "is certainly not more intolerance! HINDUISM TODAY is so broad and loving in its vision. We were uplifted to read the Bali article (Apr/May/June 2012). We had no idea how much those people love Hinduism, and knowing that makes us feel very good. This is a great service; this is what the world truly needs. And only HINDUISM TODAY

is doing it."

The Utukuris are lifetime subscribers to the magazine. They are generous donors to the Hinduism Today Production Fund of Hindu Heritage Endowment, and they have also made the fund a beneficiary in their life insurance. "We want the magazine to expand into many countries and languages and make a significant difference," declares Narendra. "And if we and others continue to support this great cause, it can happen soon."

"I am encouraged to think our grandchildren will grow up seeing and reading the magazine," Malathi adds, "and their own children after them."

Please help HINDUISM TODAY expand and reach ever more grandchildren by donating to the Production Fund here:

[hheonline.org/donate/pf](http://hheonline.org/donate/pf).  
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Or chat with us: 1-808-634-5407.



### We are counting on HINDUISM TODAY:

Dr. & Mrs. Utukuri (center, bottom) surrounded by their children and grandchildren, Avandira, Aadya, Inika and Megha in Toronto; (top) Sai Hemanth, Lekha Isha and Susmita in North Carolina.



## QUOTES & QUIPS

“Even in rags I am a God, fallen I am divine, high I triumph when down-trod, long I live when slain!”

**Sri Aurobindo** (1872–1950), *Indian philosopher and poet*

Quotations there have been, in superabundance. But what original commentary can you supply from the uniqueness of your particular life? What holy text have you absorbed and made your own? In what ways have these timeless truths renovated your nature? Are you content to be a hollow phonograph, mechanically repeating the words of other men? **Swami Sri Yukteswar Giri** (1855–1936), *guru of Satyananda Giri and Paramahansa Yogananda*

Stop identifying with the world created by your mind and a new world will open up before you. **Mata Amritanandamayi Devi**, *spiritual leader, guru, humanitarian of Kerala*

Can he rectify false weight whose own scales are uncertain? Can you enlighten your neighbor while you yourself have

no light? **Sri Ramakrishna** (1836–1886), *19th-century mystic and guru to Swami Vivekananda*

Light and darkness live together in the mind, and thus the soul seeks grace and ignorance at once. The jiva's inner knowing is bereft of light. Apart from those who have attained wisdom, the rest despair of ever dispelling their mind's darkness. *Tirumantiram 1010*

Let there be conflict. The cream arises in conflict. What harm is there if this world is destroyed? What good can there be if it continues to exist? There is nothing very seriously wrong with anything. **Satguru Yogaswami** (1872–1964), *Sri Lankan mystic*

You are never alone or helpless. The force that guides the stars guides you, too. **Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar** (1921–1990), *Indian philosopher, poet and linguist*

Turn your face to the sun and the shadows fall behind you. *Maori proverb*

When you reach the heart of life, you shall find beauty in all things, even in the eyes that are blind to beauty. **Kahlil Gibran** (1883–1931), *Lebanese-American author*

Should the perfect virtue of perfect men ever diminish, this mighty Earth would bear our burdensome weight no more. *Tirukural 990*

The mind turned inwards is the Self; turned outwards, it becomes the ego and all the world. Cotton made into various clothes we call by various names. Gold made into various ornaments we call by various names. But all the clothes are cotton and all the ornaments gold. The one is real; the many are mere names and forms. **Sri Ramana Maharshi** (1879–1950), *Indian guru*



SHUTTERSTOCK

### DID YOU KNOW?

## How Much Does an Elephant Cost?

IT IS SAID THAT IN ANCIENT INDIA, IF A king wanted to ruin a man, all he had to do was to gift him an elephant. The recipient could not refuse the royal largess, nor could he afford its upkeep. The unfortunate owner soon met with financial ruin. One wonders, is that still true today?

As it turns out, it just might be. Buying an elephant in India can cost upwards of \$10,000, but that's just the initial purchase. According to *The Elephant Sanctuary* in Tennessee, keeping just one elephant costs \$133,000 annually! Without the availability of lush vegetation, the monthly cost of food can be over \$6,000. The average human consumes just four pounds of food each day, whereas an 8,000-pound Indian

elephant will eat over 330 pounds. Their diet can include bananas, lettuce, grasses, leaves and bamboo, but hay, herbivore pellets, and acacia leaf fodder are the mainstays of a domestic elephant.

In India, apart from their religious work, elephants are used for moving logs, hauling loads to remote areas, transporting tourists and pulling carts. They are valued over mechanized equipment because they can work in water and require little maintenance, needing only vegetation and hydration. They can be trained to memorize specific tasks and will remember over 30 commands. As of 2000, there were 13,000 to 16,500 working elephants employed in Asia.

I searched for God and found only myself. I searched for myself and found only God  
*Sufi proverb*

Love is an endless mystery, for it has nothing else to explain it. **Rabindranath Tagore** (1861–1941), *mystic poet*

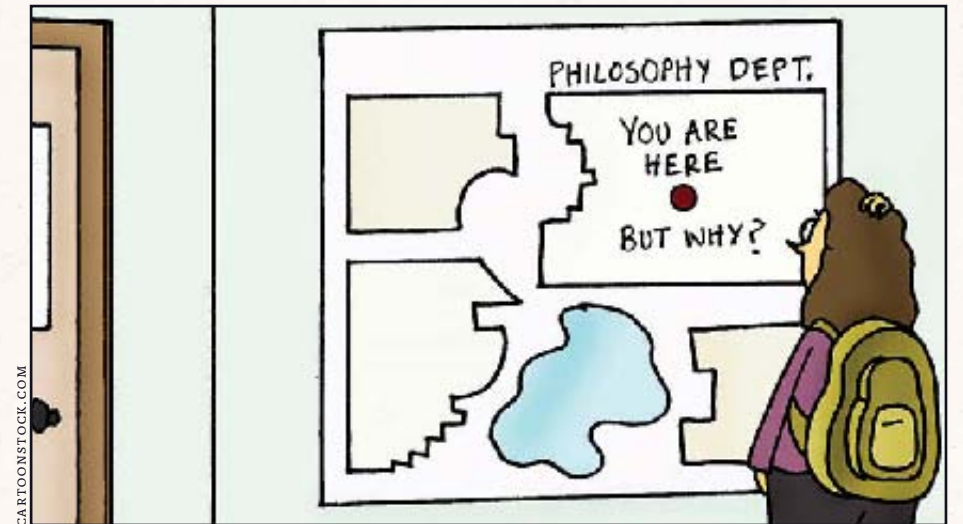
To trust a man who has not been tested and to suspect a man who has proven trustworthy lead alike to endless ills. *Tirukural 510*

I think everybody should get rich and famous and do everything they ever dreamed of so they can see that it's not the answer. **Jim Carrey** *Canadian-American actor, comedian and producer*

There is no limit to the power of the human mind. The more concentrated it is, the more power is brought to bear on one point; that is the secret. **Swami Vivekananda**

Have you ever imagined a world with no hypothetical situations? **George Carlin** (1937–2008), *American comedian and actor*

Many there are who do not even hear of Atman; though hearing of Him, many do not



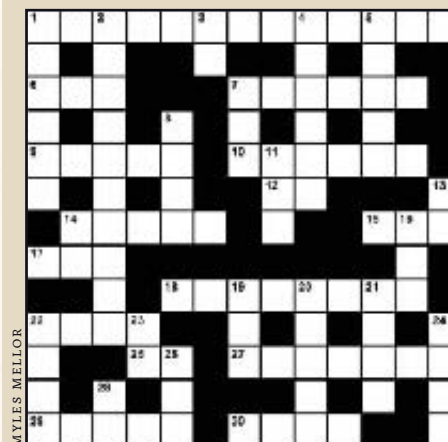
comprehend. Wonderful is the expounder and rare the hearer; rare indeed is the experiencer of Atman taught by an able preceptor. *Katha Upanishad, 1.2.7*

Becoming means there's change. We're getting more refined, getting more spiritual. Being means it already exists. Go deep enough into the soul and you get past the part that's becoming; you get into the part that's being, the essence of the soul. If we can get into the essence of the soul—which

is done through meditation—we can find that part of us that's already one with God. Nothing has to happen for that part of us to be one with God; we just have to find it. **Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami**

You are perfect this very moment. You are all that you will ever be. If you don't see it that way, then you live in a difficult state of affairs, striving toward perfection and being imperfect along the way. **Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami** (1927–2001)

## Crossword



MYLES MELLOR

### Across

1. Confluence of three rivers (2 words)
6. \_\_\_veni Marg, a very wide street through the mela grounds
7. High ranking swami in a Hindu monastic order
9. A means of expression; to utter

10. \_\_\_ Gange, "Hail to the Gange River," mantra for pilgrims (2 words)
12. Sound of laughter
14. Individual's soul
15. Colloquial Indian English for the royal "bath"
17. Shri \_\_\_ Shankaracharya
18. Number of pilgrims who came to the 2013 Kumbh Mela (2 words)
22. Curve in a river
25. The most well known mantra
27. Act of receiving blessings; seeing and being seen by a holy person
- 29–30. Pitcher Festival, the largest gathering of humans ever (2 words, with a space)

### Down

1. Reality; truth
2. Ceremony where a new member is welcomed
3. \_\_\_maste
4. Hindu monastic order, originally means "wrestling ring"
5. Most sacred river in India

7. \_\_\_atma, great soul
8. Central scriptures of Hinduism
11. \_\_\_msa, to do no harm
13. \_\_\_anishads, Hindu texts
14. \_\_\_iti, the mother of Indra
16. Frozen water
19. \_\_\_, energy centers, or channels, through which the energies of the subtle body flow
20. In the countryside
21. One of the navagrahas in Vedic astrology
22. The side of a river
23. Act
24. Kerala festival celebrating Vamana
26. \_\_\_a, great; immense
28. "\_\_\_ Namo Narayan," greeting of the Saiva Akharas and saints

Crossword answers are based on this issue's articles. For completed puzzle as well as an interactive online version visit: [bit.ly/july13crossword](http://bit.ly/july13crossword)



# How Enlightened Men Live

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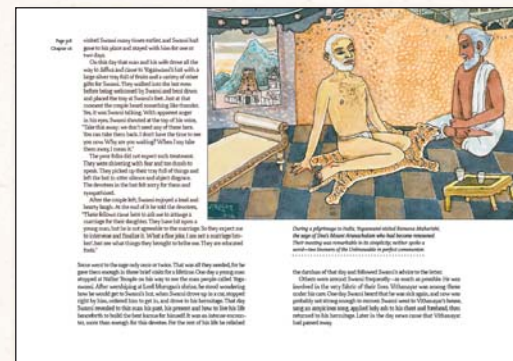
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Here is an adventure into the rarely divulged world of spiritual masters, full of extraordinary stories, insights and spiritual encounters. At its heart is the untold life of Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, who founded HINDUISM TODAY, his guru Siva Yogaswami and five preceding masters of the spiritual lineage. Illustrated by the South Indian genius, S. Rajam.



FROM THE AGAMAS

## From Bondage to Liberation

Explaining the ego's initial subjugation of the soul as a form of Siva's grace

*The following is a lucid translation of passages from the Mrigendra Agama, chapter 7, verses 3 and 15 to 23. The ego is commonly held to be the archenemy of spiritual illumination. Here the sacred texts reveal another view, that even the ego's prominence is Siva's grace, guiding the soul from the path of bondage to the path of liberation.*

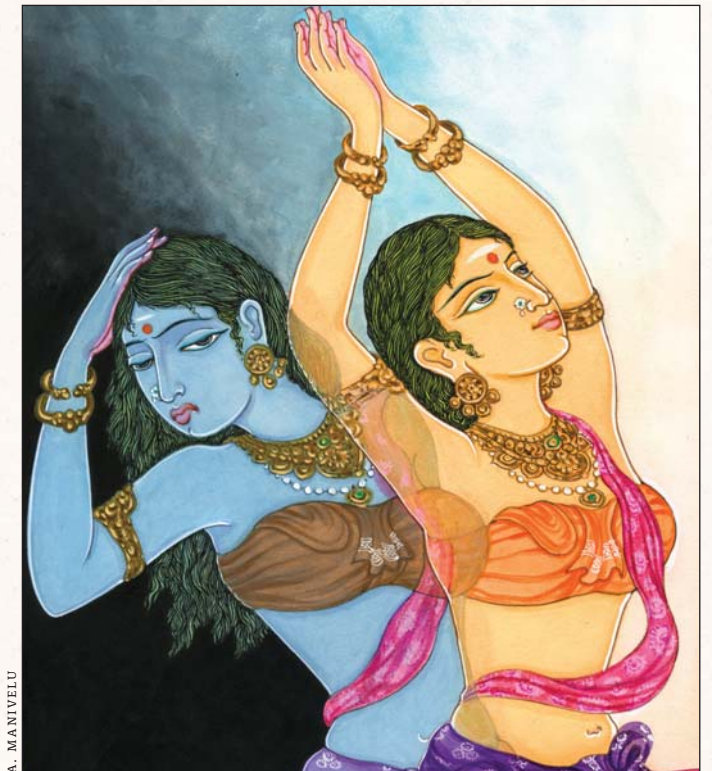
IT IS WELL OBSERVED THAT ONE WHO IS FREE FROM CONSTRICTING bonds exists always self-controlled and independent; and one who is fettered with limiting bonds subjects himself to the control of others, functioning as a dependent being. So it is ascertained that the dependent soul is fettered by limiting bonds. This is the difference between the bound soul and the liberated soul: One who is dependent is bound; and one who is independent is liberated. Therefore, it is the state of being dependent that is considered to be the state of bondage. This bound state is not permanent to the soul.

Sivashakti has the nature of bestowing grace upon all. This grace is bestowed upon intelligent beings and inert things at one and the same time. Grace is bestowed upon the potency of *anava mala* (the individualizing veil of duality; egoity), thus intensifying it, but not with the intention of making the soul suffer. Whatever action is done by Lord Siva, it is indeed an effective and unfailing help to the soul. It cannot be considered otherwise. As long as there exists the dominion of *anava mala*, liberation cannot occur to the soul, since liberation is nothing but the complete removal of the *anava mala*'s obscuration. This dominant state of *anava mala* would only be ready for removal once the soul has attained its full maturation.

But even when the power of *anava mala* becomes ripe for such maturation, its intensification does not, and cannot, take place of its own accord. It is seen that always and by all means, the non-intelligent object, in this case the ego, is kept in action only by an intelligent being. Therefore, bestowal of grace and the induction of *anava mala*'s maturation must be one and the same. Just as the oft aggravating activities of a physician—such as applying pungent medicinal substances like black-salt and others to a person's wounds—though painful, result in the healthy and happy state for that person, and it would be seen that the physician's actions are not considered cruel. Even so, for the sake of the removal of *anava mala*, the experiences of pain, misery and so on meted out through karmic effects by Siva should not be considered as afflicting or aggravating activity, but rather as healing, for they drive the soul's evolution through the understanding born of its experiences.

Since Siva is all-pervasive, His immediate and active presence in all objects and beings cannot be set aside. But where there is no need for His action, He remains neutral and free from any action.

The power of *anava mala* obscures the absolute power of knowing—all and doing—all. For those souls in whom *anava mala* is reaching its phase of maturation and removal, Sivashakti descends immediately and unfolds in the form of grace. Grace is indeed the compassionate function which makes the intensities of *anava mala*'s bonds ripe enough for removal. What is the effect of such grace, it may be asked. When the potency of *anava mala* is on its removal phase and is in its dominance, obscuring the soul, the *tirodhana*



**Fetterdom to freedom:** Without darkness there can be no light. It is the soul's journey through its sometimes dark and painful experiences which gives birth to the light of understanding.

shakti sets itself on the phase of removal and incessantly assumes the form of grace. (*Tirodhana shakti* is a pure and auspicious power, which takes command of and works in concord with the ego's obscuring potencies in order to systematically work through them. When this shakti brings about wisdom and the unfolding of consciousness, it becomes known as *anugraha shakti*.) Grace is, in actuality, the cognitive power of the bound soul brought about by its evolution through the ego's dominion and the maturing process of this inert bond.

The simultaneous occurrence of cognition and the ego's intensification is considered to be the bestowal of grace. The occurrence of grace in due order conditioned by time is, indeed, very common and simple. The same explanation holds good with the preponderant state of karma and maya, the soul's other two bonds—anava being the third—since it has already been stated in a general way that all inert things are activated only by intelligent beings.

DR. S. P. SABHARATHNAM SIVACHARYAR, of the Adi Saiva priest lineage, is an expert in ancient Tamil and Sanskrit, specializing in the *Vedas*, *Agamas* and *Shilpa Shastras*. This excerpt is from his recent translation of the *Mrigendra Agama*.



# KUMBH MELA

# Prayag 2013

*1,500 sadhus of Avahan Akhara gather on the banks of the Ganga for initiation*

**P**REPARE TO EXPERIENCE THE GREATEST GATHERING of human beings in history—100 million congregating at the confluence of the Ganga and Yamuna. In the following 47 pages, HINDUISM TODAY

will take you into the lives of both the sadhus and the pilgrims through stunning photos, revealing interviews, informed analysis and vivid descriptions from our intrepid team. Let the adventure begin! .





HINDUISM TODAY's journalistic team, Rajiv Malik and Thomas Kelly, conducted 225 interviews and took 5,000 photos from January 28 to February 12 for this report. In the attempt to convey even a small sense of this prodigious religious event, we will let the great saints and ordinary pilgrims alike—and the photos—speak for themselves wherever possible. We'll start with a description of the main bathing day, and then explore the Kumbh in a series of short articles, photo spreads and interviews.

## THE MAIN BATHING DAY

BY RAJIV MALIK, NEW DELHI

**S**HAHI SNAN, IT IS CALLED: THE royal bath. There are several during any given Kumbh Mela, but one is always considered the most auspicious. This year at the 2013 Kumbh at Prayag (Allahabad)—the confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna and unseen Saraswati rivers—that day was February 10, when an estimated 30 million devotees, including hundreds of thousands of sadhus, participated in what was unquestionably the largest gathering of human beings for any purpose in history. The numbers were high and the intent was lofty, to reach for spiritual liberation by taking a "dip" (as they call it in colloquial Indian English) at Sangam,

the place where the rivers merge. The watery immersion is made all the more holy by sharing it with the various akharas (monastic orders), who take their own dip throughout the morning hours.

The crowds moving toward Sangam in the early morning comprise devotees who have camped on the Kumbh grounds for days or weeks in advance as well as those who have just come for the one day, traveling by plane, train, bus, truck or on foot. Most are dressed warmly to protect against the chilly night temperatures. After all, this is still winter and temperatures typically fall to 45°F. Well before four in the morning, the road to the Sangam bathing ghat is packed and bathing is already underway, even though the first dip for the sadhus is scheduled for 6:30. The pilgrims walk illuminated by the harsh bright yellow mercury lights set up across the grounds. It is a largely silent procession, and most appear to be in a state of meditation.

The majority are rural folk—men dressed in colorful kurta dhoti, women in saris—all walking with their belongings on their head. A large contingent of urban dwellers are here, too, their numbers increasing each Kumbh, dressed in their I'm-from-the-city jeans and t-shirts and carrying bags in their hands, or for Generations X & Y, wearing backpacks.

The pace is unhurried, set by some unknown combination of crowd mechanics

and physical infrastructure. One can neither speed up nor slow down. There is a soft drone of ten thousand conversations overwhelmed every few minutes by the central broadcast system blaring instructions, schedules and announcements from the lost-and-found center. It is a long march, nearly eight kilometers for the ordinary pilgrims; those with a press pass can cut the distance in half. Some groups, accompanied by police, are moving forcefully ahead, an impolite intrusion which is accommodated with grace and resignation by the crowds who let them pass.

The scene changes as we arrive at the bathing ghats, where the mood is far from solemn; it is more like an oversized family party, albeit with a strong religious component. Acres of pilgrims are sitting in small groups on the sand chanting mantras such

.....  
**The great day:** (left) the Vaishnavite Shri Panchayati Akhara in procession on February 10 just before noon; the bare-chested man in the lower right is performing sword-bending tricks in front of the Mahant's chariot; (right) the ghats, still packed on the 11th, with the historic Allahabad fort in the background; (inset) this shot taken from across the river by Life Magazine during the 1954 Kumbh shows a less overgrown fort in the background.

## The Royal Bathing Day: Sadhus & devotees take their sacred dip







## Babas' Day: Tens of thousands of sadhus



(above) At 7 a.m. on the 10th, naga babas of the Niranjani and Ananda akharas charge the bathing ghats with the energy of an advancing army. (left) Pilgrims shout "Har Har Mahadev" as the babas go by. (right) A couple pause as they take repeated dips in the Ganga. (far right) Mounted police clear the way for the next procession of saints.



as "Har Har Gange" and singing bhajans. Everyone is either preparing for their dip by changing into a light outfit they've carried for the purpose, or drying themselves off and dressing in new clothes. Priests, hired by the families, are performing the time-honored rituals. Nearby a number of small homa fires have been set up for worship. After their dip, many pilgrims give donations to beggars and poor people sitting in a long queue to receive the largess—a typical act following worship in the Hindu tradition.

A raised platform for the media has been set up at the ghats adjacent to the akharas' bathing area. The foreign press seems better represented here than the Indian press. On either side of the platform, thousands and thousands of pilgrims await the arrival of the sadhus—especially the naga sadhus, who are only found in large numbers here at the Kumbh. Keeping order are commandos, horse-mounted police, the Central Government's anti-riot Rapid Action Force and the lathi-wielding regular police of Uttar Pradesh.

Around 5:30, still before sunrise, there is a flurry of activity. One naga baba who took an early dip starts dancing with joy just opposite the media stand, a scene which scores of photographers turn to capture. More babas return from the ghats. Aroused, the pilgrims shout "Har Har Gange" and "Har Har Mahadev" with increasing exuberance. Some

rush to touch the feet of the naga babas. The police have a difficult time controlling both the photographers and the pilgrims, but they accomplish this task skillfully. They are clearly aware that this is a religious event, not a riot—even if it may seem like one at times.

The crescendo is reached when hundreds of naga babas, all bellowing "Har Har Mahadev," have conscripted the road on their return to their camps. As soon as one group is gone, the ghats are cleaned—something the babas are quite particular about—before the arrival of the next. The akharas come to the water's edge two at a time, and take about 40 minutes each at the ghats. Traditionally, the Saivites come first: Mahanirvani, Niranjani, Juna, Atal, Avahan, Anand and Agni. Next come the Vaishnavites—Nirvani, Nirmohi and Digambar. Last the Udasin akharas arrive—Udasin, Naya Udasin and Nirmal.

One moment after the first departs, the next procession comes into sight, saints in the lead, with beautifully decorated chariots of all types. Several of the sadhus are carrying saffron flags printed with their akhara's sacred symbol. Devotees carry large, ornate umbrellas, holding them above each of their swamis as a sign of respect and nobility. The devotees in procession thunder "Har Har Mahadev," and the tens of thousands of watching pilgrims echo back the divine tribute. The energy continues to rise.

Come daybreak, the glaring lights are

switched off, replaced all of a sudden by the sublime light of sunrise. It is a breathtaking scene. The photographers are fully engrossed in the attempt to capture the scene in this most perfect lighting. The saints shower their blessings on the crowd, who are welcoming the Sun, Surya Devata, with folded hands. As if by some unseen command, the whole mood turns again to meditation.

The magical sunrise moments pass all too quickly. The whole area is flooded with natural daylight as the next akhara comes into view. Sadhus in saffron robes, their huge silver maces reflecting the brilliance of the sun, are accompanied by hundreds of naga babas. Nearing the ghats, the naga babas break into a trot. The hundreds of thousands of pilgrims who can now see this scene in daylight stand spellbound, with folded hands. After their holy dip, the saints look supercharged with divine power, fully capable, one sees, of bestowing the blessed boons sought by the pilgrims.

The enthralled pilgrims take their own dip after the saints, then move away from the water in a contemplative mood. They have achieved their spiritual objective and know they are that much closer to moksha.

By official estimate, hundreds of thousands of sadhus and 30 million pilgrims—yes, that's the population of Tokyo—completed the sacred bath at the Sangam ghats on this auspicious day of February 10, 2013.





## SAINTS AND AKHARAS

**T**HE KUMBH IS A 30-DAY SPECTACLE with the globe's largest audience and two superstars: Ganga Herself, the river with the world's second greatest water discharge, and the myriad saints and sadhus who camp here for the duration, leaving their maths, ashrams, temples and—for thousands of them—their mountain caves. Most Hindus will tell you that the sight of either the Ganga or the saints can liberate one from the cycle of birth and death. What to say of seeing both at once!

While sages are thought of as aloof and unworldly, anyone who spends time at the Kumbh is touched by the way they receive the common pilgrim. Rich and poor alike are showered with blessings, love and affection. Tea, snacks or even full meals are offered to everyone. It is almost as if the sadhus are worshiping the pilgrim, putting into practice that it is God Himself who has come as the guest. A saying often heard at the Kumbh is "Nar Narayan," which means "man has become as God."

The naga saints, mostly belonging to the Saiva Akharas, are the biggest attraction. Covered in holy ash and clad in a mere loin-

cloth or altogether naked, they are only accessible to the common devotee during the Kumbh. The nagas combine a charm and attraction with mystery, mysticism and a wild autonomy that makes pilgrims blessed to have their darshan, even from a distance. Traffic stops on the roads when hundreds of nagas move to or from their bath. Initiation of new sadhus is among the exceptional events of the Kumbh (see page 30).

HINDUISM TODAY has covered the last four Maha Kumbha Melas and in that process has interviewed hundreds of the saints. This time, however, the reporting team has been asked to meet saints previously unknown, often making "cold calls" without introduction. This is challenging, given the understandable suspicion of many—especially the nagas—toward the media, but ultimately it proves rewarding. In any case, making an formal appointment during this controlled chaos is simply impossible.

We begin our visitations with Swami Digambar Ishargiri of Shambu Panch Atal Akhara, a naga baba. He receives our reporter and photographer with quiet grace and answers questions on spiritual matters as well as issues confronting Hindu society today, including crimes against women and female

infanticide (see interview page 38). Pilgrims come and go during the interview, touching Swami's feet, receiving holy ash on their forehead as a blessing and often leaving a donation. Swami explains that the donations are used to buy firewood for the dhuni (sacred fire), always kept burning in the center of their tent, and to pass on to the poor who come for help. The tent is simple yet elegant, with Indian carpets and blankets on the ground. Nearly a dozen sadhus are present for the interview, and a similar number sleep here at night.

Seven Saiva and six Vaishnava akharas are represented at the Kumbh. The Saiva greeting is "Om Namo Narayana" ("Hail to Lord Narayan"). Though *Narayan* usually indicates just Vishnu, the Saivites take it to mean all forms of God. The Vaishnava greeting is

.....  
**Unworldly life:** (counterclockwise from below) A Vaishnava sadhu applies the tilak on a pilgrim; an akhara tent in the evening; ash-covered sadhus with matted hair; a new initiate at Juna Akhara; Sri Mahant Meera Puri (left) shares a moment with Sadhvi Gurmit Giri, a gifted bhajan singer

"Radhe Radhe, Jai Sita Ram" ("Hail to Goddess Radha, Hail to Lord Rama and His wife Sita").

All the akharas are beautifully lit at night with huge decorative arches at their entrances that give the sense of a vast and festive fair. Most are located on Treveni Marg and Kali Marg, two of the wide central streets, with one entrance on each marg, connected by a lane lined with tents for the important saints and, in the middle, a temple. Here the akhara flag and Deity are kept and worshiped morning and evening by a throng of sadhus and pilgrims in a majestic manner.

The Saiva akharas are most popular among Kumbh pilgrims, due to their legion of naga babas. The chillum-smoking babas (see page 70 on this practice), nearly naked even in the 45°F night temperatures, attract hundreds of thousands of pilgrims. Many just enter from the gate on one marg, take darshan of the babas and exit through the other gate; others approach the babas at their fires to seek personal blessings and hope for a few words.

The atmosphere is festive, and at any given time tens of thousands of pilgrims are in the area visiting sadhus in their camps. Walking through the area, one sees sadhus sitting at their dhunis surrounded by disciples and pilgrims, including a surprising number of women and foreigners.

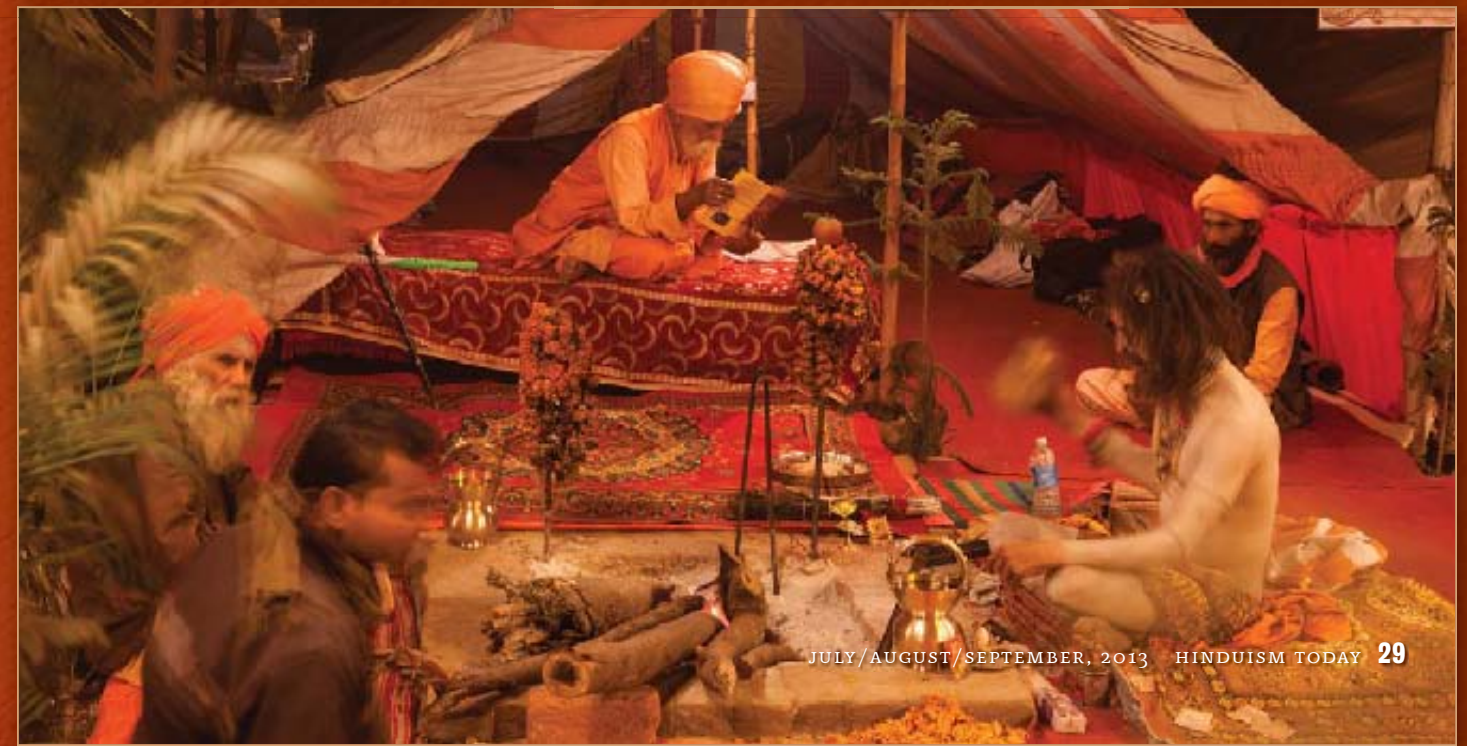
If one sits and listens, it becomes evident that discussions can range freely from spirituality to politics, crimes against women, corruption, unfair treatment of Hinduism by the secular politicians, conversion to other religions and the pollution of the Ganga. Tea and snacks are liberally served by volunteers—mostly young sadhus, but sometimes householders. The young sadhus are also responsible for keeping the dhunis burning around the clock. The fire should never go out. All the akharas function in this manner, from morning to night.

One of the most prominent camps is that of Acharya Mahamandaleshwar Swami Avdheshanand Ji Maharaj, chief of Juna

Akhara and HINDUISM TODAY's Hindu of the Year for 2008. Spread over several acres, his camp includes a huge dining hall, a full-fledged office, a reception center, a bookstore and a shop selling tea and other essentials at cost. Every room and hall is tastefully designed; the entire place is neat, clean and impeccably maintained.

The only similar camp is across the Ganga and best reached by boat: that of Swami Chidananda Saraswati (Muniji) of Parmarth Niketan, Rishikesh (our Hindu of the Year for 1992). This camp, masterfully organized and decorated, hums with hectic activity. Celebrities from the worlds of spirituality, politics and even film can be found here, along with hundreds of foreign guests. This camp has hosted several important conferences focused on the environment, especially the cleaning of the Ganga (see Muniji's commentary on page 39). All the other akharas and pilgrim camps offer more basic facilities and a more humble ambience.

## Bountiful Blessings: Sadhus & pilgrims intersect at the Kumbh





## INITIATIONS

**T**HE INITIATION OF NEW SADHUS AT the Kumbh is second in importance only to the main bathing days. At this auspicious event, thousands of men and a few women, young and old, are given the rites of passage into the Hindu monastic tradition of sannyas. In past Kumbhs, these rites were open to the public and the media; but this time most akharas went to great lengths to keep the ceremonies private, apparently concluding that worldly attention does not enhance the profound sacrament. Swami Avdheshanand categorically stated he would not allow the media or even the Juna Akhara's householder followers to attend.

By chance, our reporting team encountered one group of new Juna Akhara initiates returning from Sangam after concluding part of the initiation rituals. There was a huge commotion as thousands of pilgrims shouted "Har Har Mahadev" and sought their blessings. Our team followed the hundreds of sadhus inside, but almost immediately all media persons were summarily ejected by the *kotwals*, sadhus carrying large silver staffs and charged with security.

Fortunately, HINDUISM TODAY was invited to cover the initiation of 1,500 new sadhus into the Avahan Akhara, perhaps because one of their important saints hails from Nepal and took a liking to our Nepal-based, Nepalese-speaking photographer. At any rate, the akhara's top swamis consented to interviews.

Karobari Swami Ved Vyas Puri, the Akhara's business manager, spoke with the team in some detail about the initiation:

"The day began with the 1,500 new initiates abandoning all their clothes and donning just a loincloth. They were then taken to Sangam, where their heads were shaved, leaving just the *choti* tuft at the back. They then performed the *pinda daan* [the offering to their ancestors which completes all their worldly obligations, a rite normally performed by sons upon the death of their father]. They then take 108 dips in the Ganga and are given their *danda* (staff), *kamandalu* (water pot) and sacred thread.

This evening their guru will cut off the *choti* and give them the *pres*h mantra, which is in our coded language. At this stage they are called *mahapurushas* (great men). On February 10, the royal bathing day, they will be given *digambar* diksha, (sky clad initia-

tion), at which point they are fully naga sadhus. After this, the akhara judges their talents and assigns suitable responsibilities to each."

Sri Mahant Satya Giri Ji Maharaj, the akhara's secretary, spoke further on the sadhus' life: "Once initiated, our 1,500 sadhus will go into society and work for the promotion of dharma. It is not compulsory that they remain naked all the time; they can also wear clothes according to the circumstances. There was a time when I was like them and lived naked, but now I am an office bearer and wear clothes, even for the royal bath."

Shri Subodh Acharya, one of the four priests conducting the akhara's initiation rituals, added, "We have done the rituals in accord with the tradition of the Dashanami sannyasins as laid down by Adi Shankaracharya. In every Kumbh it is done this way only."

**Sacred initiation:** (below) Two of the 1,500 initiates of Avahan Akhara gathered on the banks walk toward the Ganga to take 108 dips in the river; (right) local barbers expertly shave the initiates; (far right) young and old initiates alike seek the river's blessings with offerings of flowers



ALL PHOTOS: THOMAS KELLY

## Saints Being Born: 1,500 men enter Hinduism's ancient order of monks







**Rich & Poor:** The logistics of low and high budget travel



(above) The Kumbh city, spreading out across 20 square kilometers of the river flood plains, can only be captured in part by an ordinary camera (see the inside cover for the satellite view); (left) pilgrims from the rural areas stream into the Kumbh grounds, belongings on their heads; (right) this group pauses for a rest—the metal pots for collecting food from the free kitchens and the plastic jugs for Ganga water to take back to their homes.

## PILGRIMS' SOJOURN

**N**OT ALL KUMBH DEVOTEES ARE alike. Some camp for an extended time, most stay for a few days and others come only to take the bath, departing the same day. For all of them, the Kumbh is full of challenges and uncertainties, paradoxically more so for the affluent than for the poor.

The upper-middle-class or upper-class pilgrim typically struggles to plan the trip, book plane or railway tickets and locate decent accommodations—which are in short supply here and increasingly expensive. The poor man has but to pack his bag and leave. He requires no reservations; he takes any bus or train that can accommodate him—standing all the way if need be.

The hearty villager can carry his bag on his head and walk ten or twenty kilometers across the expansive grounds without getting fatigued. The sedentary urbanite can barely manage the walk, leave alone carrying his own suitcases. Unless he has government connections to provide transport, he looks in vain for the rare three-wheeler to get him about. The Kumbh demands more of those who demand more.

The urbanite faces daily frustration and unending haggling when his expectations are not met; the villager has no expectations and is content with what God provides. He can sit or sleep anywhere along the road, under a tree or in the marketplace, which is

deserted at night. He waits happily in line for the free tea and food available at the bhandaras run by the various religious organizations and akharas of saints, or he cooks his own food beside the road over a small fire. The urbanite is constantly worried about clean food, clean water and sanitation facilities—not to mention security, lest someone steal his valuables.

Poor pilgrims enjoy every moment of their pilgrimage. They can be seen walking on the roads any hour of the day. Many will not rest or take food until they have had their bath. They may or may not visit the akharas for darshan of the sadhus; having the holy dip is the ultimate spiritual experience for them, after which they repose in bliss and peace.

Affluent pilgrims certainly may have an intense spiritual experience, but they spend considerably more time and energy worrying about their mundane circumstances and comforts. Without doubt, however, all are one in their faith in Mother Ganga.

Another group, who may be poor or rich, are those associated with one of the akharas or ashrams which have a camp on the Kumbh grounds. Their accommodations are good, in some cases luxurious, but mostly they benefit from the akharas' access and influence area.

A special group of pilgrims, on the order of a million, are the kalpavasis (see page 40), who stay an entire month on the grounds, bathing daily in the Ganga, eating one meal a day, visiting the saints and attending frequent

bhajans.

Pilgrims' budgets range from ten to several thousand dollars. At one extreme are the majestic tents set up by the government, private enterprises and some of the ashrams, where the nightly rates rival that of a five-star Delhi hotel, running from <sup>US</sup>\$110 to \$370—this for a canvas tent and a cot set up on sand. For \$18.50 to \$185, one can stay in the city of Allahabad (Prayag) at one of hundreds of hotels and guest houses. There are also ashrams, dharmasalas and tented accommodations, both in Allahabad and the Kumbh Mela area, where one can stay almost without cost, with access to the free community kitchens.

Polluted air is a greater hazard to pilgrims than polluted water. The entire grounds are sand. Though the area is constantly being watered down by trucks, the dust—combined with the smoke from tens of thousands of fires—causes many lung-related difficulties. Night temperatures fall to 45°F in early February. But few pilgrims complain about these problems.

For numberless wayfarers on any given day there is a place to sleep, food to eat, water to drink and toilets to use. This astounding logistical triumph attracted a multifaceted team of dozens of scholars from Harvard University, who recognize that this vast temporary city offers lessons for other circumstances, such as the creation of refugee camps. Their report, not yet released, will be covered in a future issue of HINDUISM TODAY.







*The Kumbh Mela grounds on each side of the Ganga are connected by temporary pontoon bridges. (inset) The same grounds in 1954.*





## Pilgrim Voices

DELHI

### “The Energy Level Is So High”

**W**E CAME HERE YESTERDAY. I had an early morning snan (holy dip) today and felt really blissful. This is the fourth Kumbh we are attending. I have been doing Sivangi sadhana for the past few days in conjunction with the full moon of Thai Pusam, which is supposed to be very powerful. The sadhana lasts 42 days and includes fasting,

penance and begging, which I am doing now. The pilgrims' faith and desire for liberation unites them all, brings them here and connects them with so many sampradayas, saints, Gods and Goddesses. The energy level is so high here that it is difficult to explain in words. Only those who are here to taste this atmosphere can understand.



Shri Har Lal Gupta (far right), 73, a merchant, and wife Maya Devi (far left) with friends meeting Swami Gopal Sharan Devacharya

DELHI

### “Hindu Dharma Is the Best”

**A**T PAST KUMBH MELAS THERE was not so much rush, and the number of people was much less. The morning snan was easily manageable. This morning, when we went for the snan, it turned to be no less than a battle of Mahabharata, as there was so much rush. We could undertake the snan only with great

difficulty. One big difference now is that I am aged. When I was young, I used to run to reach the ghats. In no other country can you see the kind of faith Hindus have in their dharma. After attending five Kumbh Melas, my own conclusion is that Hindu dharma is the best dharma in the world.



Dinesh Shah, a hotel consultant, begging during the Kumbh as part of his 42-day sadhana during the event

CALIFORNIA

### “Just Amazing”

**I**HAVE BEEN COMING TO INDIA for four years. Initially, I came to learn more yoga, and I gradually got interested in the Indian culture. I came here right after the first bathing day. The magnitude of the festival is amazing. It is wonderful sitting around the dhunis (sacred fires). You can read books about the Kumbh Mela, you can see it on the Internet, but you cannot understand what it is unless you come here. The amazing energy of walking down the wide Sangam Road has to be experienced to know what Kumbh is. You see people walking singing beautiful bhajans. I think the beauty and magnitude of the faith at such a great level is something worth experiencing. It really does not matter

what your label of religion is, the spiritual vibrations and energy here would just seep into your consciousness.



Kimberly “Kamala” Jordan, yoga teacher from Los Angeles

SOCIAL ISSUES

## Sadhvi Conducts “Woman Power Camp”

Leading woman saint of Niranjani Akhara convened the Kumbh's women constables for an evening of education and inspiration

BY RAJIV MALIK, DELHI

**S**ADHVI ANANDAMAYI MA, MAHAMANDALSHWAR of Niranjani Akhara, spoke to the policewomen assembled before her with deep conviction and passion: “The idea is to inspire and encourage you to fearlessly work for the betterment of exploited and harassed women. You can do this in a better way if you are yourself enlightened, aware and spiritually powerful.”

She continued, “The killing of female children in the womb and the rape of young girls are issues that have shaken my soul. As a result, on this holy land of Kumbh, I have taken a vow from now onwards to completely work for the empowerment of women. It is the duty of spiritual people to cure social evils. Every day we say, ‘Let dharma prevail’ and ‘May adharm (unrighteousness) be destroyed,’ but unrighteousness is increasing day by day. My aim is to organize one million women who will work together with the power of one hundred million.”

The animated gathering, attended by some fifty policewomen, was well timed. Saints across the entire Kumbh were discussing female infanticide and crimes against women. Maa Anandamayi organized several other events at the Kumbh, with the help of activists such as Dr. Rama Singh, to highlight the

plight of the common Hindu woman in today's society.

Inspector General Alok Singh of the Kumbh police force addressed the gathering. He revealed first that the force has scrambled to hire women constables, and some of those present in uniform were assigned to the Kumbh even before completing their basic training, so great was the need. “There is a big demand for women police,” he said, “as they are sensitive to the needs of the young girls and also the elderly. The saint's discussions here at the Kumbh on woman empowerment and female infanticide are sure to yield solutions that will be implemented by society.”

“We women constables are generally reluctant to speak from public platforms,” Vibha Pandey confided. “Preventing the harassment of women by their own family can be achieved not only by educating women but by making them financially independent. Illiterate women are beaten by drunk husbands and harassed by mothers-in-law. Financially independent women are given respect, because the husband and his family realize you can manage without their support.”

Suman Goswami, a social worker based in Allahabad, spoke up: “Whenever there is a crisis for women in this country, it is the forces of Sanatana Dharma which come

forward to save them. Working women, including women police constables, face a lot of problems in their professional and personal lives. It is a constant challenge for them to maintain their dignity and independence both at home and in the offices. Whenever there are atrocities against women anywhere, we must all stand together and oppose them.”

Manju Pathak of Allahabad, also a social worker, explained: “Ours is a male-dominated society. Men want to keep women dependent on them and confined within the four walls of their homes. However, while we fight for our rights, we have to live within the bounds of good social conduct and not cross those boundaries.”

Dr. Singh told HINDUISM TODAY, “Sadhvi Anandamayi Ma is asking women to claim their rights from their family and the world, not by revolting but through love. She is working to secure their right not to break up society but to unite it and make it better. When women receive such direction from a spiritual personality, it has a positive impact on them.” Nothing similar to Sadhvi Anandamayi Ma's event has been organized, even though the treatment of women is a major topic among the saints. Her gatherings were well advertised and attracted significant attention from the media.



**Bettering the lot of women:** (left) Sadhvi Anandamayi Ma (center) poses for the media with participants of the camp; (right) the young constables listen attentively





## Voices of the Saints

HIMALAYAS

### “Here to Bless The Pilgrims”

**W**E ARE ONE OF THE WELL-known Shaiva akharas. We are all naga sannyasins. It is difficult to know how many we are in total. The Kumbh is going on nicely and peacefully. The naga sannyasins are enjoying the bathing and going around the Kumbh mela area merrily. Police and administration are nice. We are here to bless the pilgrims. It is believed that with the mere darshan of nagas, one's sins are washed away. We would like to give blessings to all the Hindus of the world. We are the force of dharma. We normally work silently, but when we see that the force of karma is not effective, then we come into action to save

any threat to our dharma.

#### Children

The problems we are facing today are because we have not brought up our children the way we should. We have allowed our children to become modern, advanced and forward. But we have not taught them about their duties and limitations.

Most of the youth and their parents have just a working kind of relationship; they are not really on speaking terms with each other. Gradually the relationship between parents and children is deteriorating, as the culture is also changing.

Today we are not respecting our saints. Crime against our

women is increasing. Our girls are being killed in the wombs of their mothers. Even the government is not putting a check on all this. Our daughters are also a part of the force who preserve and protect our religion when they assume the role of mothers.

We have so many eminent saints teaching good things in direct *kathas* and through television. Why is this not having an impact on the society? Why do our youth and even householders continue to live in the same way and do not change even after listening to the stories of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*?

#### Treatment of Sadhus

Our dharma is facing all kind of dangers. Today the temples are being handed over to the trustees, and sadhus are being pushed out. Sadhus are being told to go

.....  
*Shri Digambar Ishvargiri, a naga sannyasin of the Shambhu Panch Atal Akhara, sitting at the dhuni in his tent*

and stay in jungles. In the past, for sadhus there was land which was provided by the kings and the governments in cities and villages alike. Today we are supposed to purchase land for building ashrams and temples. Today the saints cannot find shelter even in the cremation grounds. Even there, the commercial people are running their shops.

#### The Dhuni Fire

We worship our sacred fire, *dhuni*. It is Narayan. It is kept alive round the clock. Through it, we pray for the welfare of the people. If you sit around the dhuni, your speech becomes purified and your meditation deepens. Devatas appear out of the dhuni; it holds great significance for us. All the ash we use to cover ourselves comes from this sacred fire.



PHOTO: THOMAS KELLY

## ENVIRONMENT

### Promoting a Green Gathering

The head of Parmarth Niketan explains why he took his “Clean the Ganga” movement to Sangam

BY SWAMI CHIDANAND SARASWATI (MUNIJI)

**T**HE MAHA KUMBH MELA WAS A HISTORIC EVENT, NOT ONLY because of the huge, teeming crowds of devotees from every corner of the Earth, but especially because of its unprecedented emphasis, awareness and focus on environmental protection. I have been attending Kumbh Melas and the Ardh Kumbh Melas since 1974, and this is the first one where the “green” aspect was so prevalent. We have been working for many years to have this Green Kumbh Initiative, which I feel was most successful. Thousands of students from local schools, the fisherman community, judges and advocates of the High Court, professors and students from the university and so, so many local people all came together at various times of the Kumbh to take part in the programs, conferences, events and actions we organized as part of this Green Kumbh Initiative.

The impact has been successful and lasting. To keep up the momentum and focus, a Paryavarn Kumbha, Environmental Kumbha, will be held in Allahabad on the 19th and 20th of April. Judges and advocates have become more aware of the crucial need to uphold and create laws protecting the natural environment, and particularly Ganga. Local people—not only from Allahabad but from all over India—have become educated, informed and inspired about the ways they can help protect Ganga. Another wonderful outcome was that our Cabinet Minister for Water Resources came to our Kumbh Mela camp. He was impressed and touched by the compelling aspects of the work for Ganga, Yamuna and the Green Kumbha. Then, just a few weeks ago, in the immediate wake of Kumbh, I helped to mediate an agreement between him and Yamuna activists from the Vrindavan/Mathura area in which he has officially agreed to build canals alongside the banks of the Yamuna into which the sewage will flow instead of into the Yamuna. Coming just three weeks after the Kumbh, this is a major positive result.

The biggest challenges we face are in the form of educating the general population about the crucial nature of the situation. Ganga is a Divine Goddess who came down from Heaven, in the form of the river, to liberate the sons of King Sagara. Therefore, Her divinity, Her purity, Her perfection, the essence of Divine Ganga—the moksha-giving, liberating nature of Ganga—existed before She took this form and continues to exist regardless of how “clean” or “dirty” the actual water molecules may be. So people sometimes have difficulty separating the inherent purity, perfection and divinity of Ganga from the current polluted nature of Her waters.

Some 450 million people depend upon Ganga every day of their lives—not on Her divine essence for moksha, liberation or divine connection, but on the very physical water molecules they need for their drinking water, cooking water and irrigation water. Their very lives and livelihoods depend upon Her water staying not only pure but also clean.

.....  
**Taking action:** Swamiji pitches in with his gurukulam students and devotees to clean the Ganga at the Kumbh





# Kalpavasi Enduring Diurnal Disciplines

One million-plus devotees from all walks of life sojourn at Sangam for a full month of rigorous sadhana and joyous devotion

*Most of the Kumbh grounds are set aside not for the hundreds of thousands of sadhus present, who are mostly in sector 4, but for the huge number of pilgrims who come to spend the full month of Magh. One of these pilgrims from the recently formed central Indian state of Chhattisgarh, explains who they are and what they do.*

BY BHAGWATI SHANKAR GUPTA

**B**Y COINCIDENCE, BOTH MY WIFE and I were born in our respective homes after a recitation of *Bhagavatha Purana* and named after the scripture—I as Bhagwati Shankar, she as Bhagvathi Devi. We are a group of 80 who came 700 kilometers from Chhattisgarh, bringing all our belongings in a truck. Our guru is Sadhu Vir Vratī Prabal Ji Maharaj, who is a disciple of Karpatri Ji Maharaj. We have been doing *kalpavas* ["long stay"] here each year for ten years, not just for this Kumbh. Though the Kumbh is held at four places, *kalpavas* is done only here at Prayag Raj, on the banks of Sangam, in the month of Magh [in 2013, January 27 to February 25]. By doing *kalpavas* we earn a lot of spiritual merit as per our scriptures. My life has been completely transformed since I started this.

**In the Kumbh spirit:** (left) Bhagwati Shankar Gupta and his wife Bhagvathi Devi, both 63; (right) percussion section for bhajana



As *kalpavasis* we have to sleep on the ground, take a daily bath in the Ganga and live a disciplined life with minimum food. We spend as much time as we can in performing bhajans and reading scriptures. We cannot leave the city of Allahabad during the thirty days. Our *suhagins*, married women whose husbands are alive, also fast on Mondays and Thursdays.

We cook our own food and do not take onions or garlic. Rarely do we take free food at the bhandaras, and then only if we have donated something to them first. Sometimes we ourselves organize bhandaras, according to our financial capabilities. We are supposed to have food just once a day, but these days we are a bit more liberal. Many of us have food twice a day, especially those in poor health.

Most of the people in our group are from the age of 60 to 90 years and mostly couples. The per-head expense of *kalpavas* is around US\$92 for a one-month stay here.

At five in the morning our group of eighty goes for a bath in Ganga, which is not far from our camp. Following the rules of *kalpavas*, this bath has to be taken before sunrise; therefore, we get up around 3:30am. At Ganga we just do the bath. Brushing of teeth and other daily duties are performed here at camp only, because we do not want to pollute the water of Mother Ganga. It takes over an hour for all of us to finish bathing.

After the bath, we make a Sivalinga out of sand on the banks of Mother Ganga and worship it. Then we perform Ganga arati and make donations to the brahmins who are there. After coming back to camp, we do the puja of our own Ishta

Devata. We also go through scriptures, including *Gita* and *Ramayana*.

Around *gam* we take food and then sing bhajans. In fact, we go to the Ganga singing bhajans and come back singing bhajans. We have some musical instruments for this. When we go for the darshan and satsang of saints, all eighty of us go together. Sometimes others join us. We never lock our tents when we go out, as we feel absolutely safe here.

There are hundreds of thousands of people who do *kalpavas* here at Prayag every year in the month of Magh. The biggest number come from Chhattisgarh. I feel everyone should come and do *kalpavas* here on the banks of Sangam in Prayag Raj. If you do it at home, you get just 10 percent benefit. If you do it in the temple, you get 30 percent benefit. But if you come to Prayag Raj and do *kalpavas*, you get 100 percent benefit. Whatever charity or penance one does here will have a lot of value in the realm of the Gods.

After six years of *kalpavas*, we have to make special offerings to the brahmins here. I did so when I completed six years and will do it again once we complete 12 years.

I have been coming here for the 30-day *kalpavas* with my group for the past ten years. Over that time the water level of Ganga has gone down, and that is a big problem. Interestingly, the water of Ganga that you see is of brownish color and not so clean. However, every year for the past ten years I have been taking this water home with me. When kept for some time, it becomes very clean. Waters of other rivers are not like this; it is special quality of Ganga water. If Hindus in India get united, things can change for Ganga. But I am a very small man and it is difficult for me to speak on this subject.



**A Kalpavasi camp:** (above) Gupta and part of his group engage in a lively bhajan for the benefit of our photographer; (right) tending to the ordinary chores of the day; (below) four ladies chat while a few more nap inside a spartan tent. Shortly after the main bathing day on February 10, heavy rains turned these camps into soggy lakes, but few *kalpavasis* abandoned their sadhana.







A broad view of the Sangam ghat and pilgrim tents (center); clockwise from bottom: two Nepalese sadhvis hug each other at the Juna Akhara sadhvi camp; a naga baba wearing rudraksha malas over his body; two saints enjoying prasad; a young boy having his holy dip at sangam; a pilgrim performing Ganga arati; an elderly Hindu woman prays, having bathed in the Ganga

ALL PHOTOS: THOMAS KELLY



## Nepal's Female Contemplatives

**M**ahant Divya Giri poses with sadhvis and new initiates of the all-woman Dasanami Sannyasini wing of Juna Akhara. The initiation ceremony followed that of the thousands of new sadhus of Juna Akhara. A number of the sadhvis in this photo are from Nepal. An estimated ten thousand sadhvis are residing at the Kumbh, of which 147 are at Juna Akhara. Their camp was popular with the pilgrims, many of whom joined the sadhvis for darshan, bhajana and tea.





# Youth, Marriage, Kumbh and Death Itself

## Swami Hari Prakash Udasin wades into the issues facing Hinduism

BY RAJIV MALIK

IT IS OFTEN SAID THAT HINDUISM HAS A LOT OF PROBLEMS WITH caste differentiation and discrimination. However, no one who has come to the Kumbh Mela and taken a bath at Sangam has been asked about their caste. If we had a big problem related to caste, then where brahmins and kshatriyas were having bath, the entry of shudras would have been banned. But you see nothing like this happening. Dharma has not only united us but taught us a lesson in equality. It is only because of festivals like Kumbh that we are not just Punjabis, Gujaratis, Tamils or Marathis, but all united as Hindus. In the name of Kumbh we are all one. In past centuries there have been thousands who wanted to destroy us, but they could not succeed. The Kumbh is one reason. This gathering is the result of the internal devotion, faith and dedication of the masses; it is not social or caste based. Even if a Muslim is bathing in the Ganga, we praise his good fortune. I do not know if this large-heartedness is present in other religions.

### Youth

If our youth understand their duties and start performing them, then it will be good both for our country and Hindu dharma. It is unfortunate that, although we fight for our rights and agitate about them, we never, ever talk about our duties. The man who performs his duty does not have to ask for his rights—the rights due to him fall into his lap. So whether or not we can inspire the youth from the angle of dharma, we must teach them to perform their duties. If we saints can only accomplish this much, we will consider ourselves successful.

The truth is that the youth today are not taking guidance from saints or even from their parents. The influence of TV and of the West has confused us and taken us off the correct path. Our sisters and daughters are going on dates, and we listen to news of gang rapes and killings. Why is all this happening? Who wishes to have his sister or daughter murdered? Our Hindu sanskars would never permit this. Today we have instances of relationships without marriage, just living together. All this is leading to a shabby state of affairs. All this is not a part of our culture. This wind of Westernization is blowing from Europe and America. We do not take the good from their culture, but we readily

accept the bad.

Most of our youth are not learning what they should, and they are confused. In areas of the country where the youth have improved, the region has been transformed. The painful thing is that many are not trying to improve. Certainly there are young people who have reached the top in their chosen fields, but they are small in number. Most are off track. Our youth have ample energy, but it needs to be channeled correctly so that we can change this world.

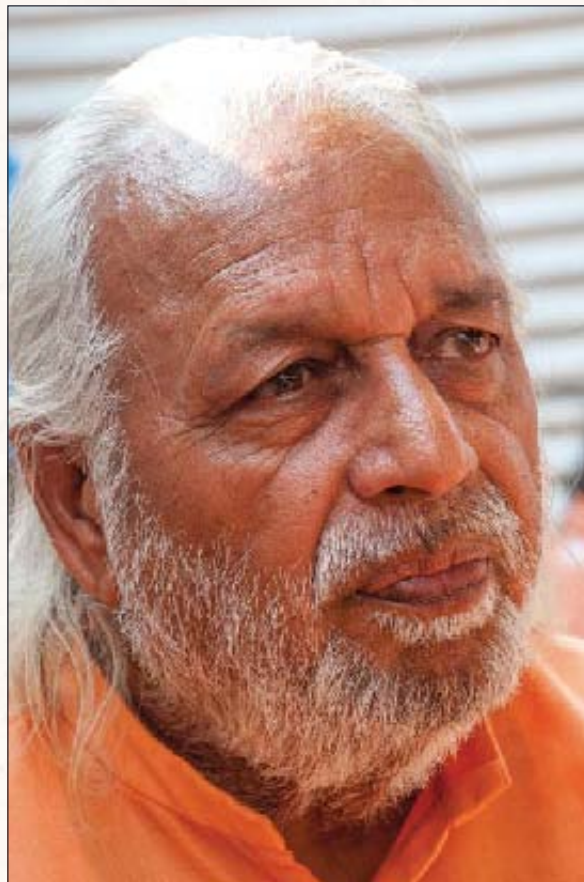
### Marriage

All this is leading to love marriages. There is hardly any love in these marriages. It is just infatuation. Their mind does not work, and they use their heart to make the decision. When the wisdom, mind and heart are not in unison, any decision made will not be correct. The heart itself is not very stable; decisions made by it are not very durable. In the practical world, the hard realities of life often cause love to vanish for couples who have married out of love. In earlier times the marriages were arranged by the parents, and they were everlasting or long-lived. A marriage that is arranged by the family has no expectations, but a love marriage has expectations. When something becomes one's own, then one gets bored with that thing—this is the nature of a human being. That is the reason the love marriages fail 90% of the time. Arranged marriages are 90% successful and only 10% fail. So now tell me if our arranged marriage system is correct, or is the European way of love marriages correct? A live-in relationship is not needed at all.

This menace of drug addiction is also affecting our youth in a big way. They take drugs and are playing with their lives. Not only our youth are to be blamed for this; the elders too are to be blamed.

### Responsibility of Parents, Elders and Saints

Today what the spiritual gurus and parents are teaching is not having any effect on the youth, because they themselves are not practicing what they are preaching. What we see our gurus and parents practice has a profound impact on us. So we will have to walk our talk if we wish to have an impact on our children.



**Sharing wisdom:** (above) Mahamandaleshwar Swami Hari Prakash Udasin, 79, of Panchayati Akhara Bada Udasin, Haridwar

Some of us are living double lives. That is why the saints who preach so much on television are not able to influence the lives of people. They themselves do not practice what they are preaching, and the people know it well. In earlier times people would go to the ashram of a rishi, and by observing that way of living they would learn. Now it is just speech-making. This trend was not there in the ancient times. It is the pure conduct of a person which has a lasting impact on others. Words can just stir up passions momentarily. It is one's conduct that can transform others, not one's words.

### Sanatana Dharma and Religion

Our guru paramapara started from ancient seers like Sanak, Sanatan and Sanatkumara. They were all the manas putras (mind-made sons) of Lord Brahma. Sanatana Dharma is not something created by a particular individual. Whatever is created by man is not everlasting, as man himself is not everlasting. The various religions of the world are not religions, they are *matas* and *panthas*. Those matas have been established by specific individuals. However, Sanatana Dharma was not established by any one person. Neither any rishis nor Rama nor Krishna established it. *Sanatana* means eternal, which was, which is and which will always remain. During the time of Buddha, there was a domination of Buddhism, and Sanatana Dharma was in the background. But then Shankaracharya came, and our tree of Sanatana Dharma was green once again. So Sanatana Dharma also has seen ups and downs. Even today in Hinduism there are certain panths which are guru oriented. In Sanatana Dharma too much importance to a person is not appropriate.

### Death

When most people die, their pranas go out from the lower parts of their body. For about 20 percent, the pranas go out through the mouth. Then there are more elevated ones, just a few percent, whose pranas go out through the eyes, ears and nose. For just a few out of millions, the pranas go out through their head, through the sahasrara chakra.

### Shahi Snan

Bathing in Ganga water is important, but even more important is the devotion and faith with which we enter the water of Ganga. If the level of devotion is not proper, then we will not get the due merit out of even a seemingly good action. So when one goes for a snan at the Ganga, one has to observe the purity of body, mind and soul. One has to be sweet to others, nice to others, focused, devoted and in a contemplative state of mind. Your speech, your eyes, your ears, your hands—all have to be without any vasanas or worldly attractions. Then only the snan in Ganga will be of benefit. To become liberated by the Ganga bath you have to be a deserving *patra* or utensil. You have to be a clean utensil.

### On Himself

I did not participate in the procession for the snan because I cannot sit on an elephant for seven hours. I go and have a bath at leisure when it is suitable to me, and then for a long time and just like a small child. I just undertake at this age what is suitable to my body and naturally convenient to me. I am more happy taking care of the feeding of all

those devotees who are visiting my camp. Though I am a mahamandaleshwar, I do not believe in much pomp and show.

SERIOUSNESS IS NOT THE NATURAL STATE OF A HUMAN BEING; BEING simple and natural is our proper style. We have to be childlike. Simplicity is the result of sadhana. If one is not natural and simple, then the sadhana of that person is not bearing him any fruit.

### International Hinduism

Hindus outside India are better Hindus and are more devoted to their religion. They are more organized and united as well. In fact, they have preserved the Hindutva in themselves. They are also very keen to give the good sanskars of Hindutva to their children and youth. Here in India we are sending our children to Christian schools, where they have to pray as per the Christian traditions. If they wear a tilak or shikha in a convent school, they are punished by the school authorities. Even our girls, when they pierce their nose or ears, are punished. Here in India we are not as good Hindus as our brethren abroad, who are more devoted to Hinduism.

### The State of Hinduism

Hindus today are valuing money over religion. I knew a doctor whose father and even grandfather were my devotees; he used the name of a different sect to run his shop. When I asked him, he said he was doing it for the sake of business. So some Hindus go to any length to gain money. A Muslim will leave all his clients if his time for namaaz comes. But a Hindu will give preference to attending his clients and miss the temple arati. So we give more importance to money over our religion, while people of other religions do not behave this way.

We are not taught to be good human beings from childhood. Rather we are taught how to be successful in making money. Today we are not attaching due value and importance to moral values, as we did in the olden times. That is the reason there is a deterioration of the character and moral values in the present generation. It is

because of this fall in moral values that we are becoming a corrupt society. Our political leaders are also corrupt, and they are setting wrong standards and a wrong code of conduct, which the common man is now following.

It is sad that today even some of our saints are not very honest in their conduct. They speak of penance and renunciation, but when it comes to the wealth accumulated by them, they try to pass it on to their close relatives. *Ramayana* says that the root of all wrong things is in the attachment to worldly things. Today, however, the saints who are married will pass on their seat only to their son and not to a deserving disciple. This is what they practice, although they preach renunciation of the world.

Today, unfortunately, almost everyone compromises for monetary gains, whether he is a successful politician, businessman or saint. Therefore, how can others follow them and become honest? In the end, I would like to say that only those who do not get attached to the things of the world are eternally happy.



**Austere quarters:** Swami paused frequently during the interview to explain the questions and his thinking to the assembled devotees



## Voices of the Saints

HIMACHAL PRADESH

### “Emphasis on Brahmacharya”

IT IS UNFORTUNATE THAT INSTEAD of sadhus impressing or influencing people, people are exerting influence on the sadhus. Sadhus listen patiently to what people have to say, but people are not listening as patiently to what sadhus are telling them. It is even happening that corrupt people are influencing the sadhus. Sadhus should be careful to choose the company of good people.

MANY OF OUR SAINTS PREACH good things via TV channels and kathas which are watched and attended by hundreds of thousands of people, but still they have not been able to bring about any improvement in the society. Why?

#### Kumbh Mela

The government has only laid down the basic infrastructure for this Kumbh Mela city. All

other arrangements have been done by saints and akharas. Each has put up their own tents out of their own money.

#### Youth

Yesterday I was visited by some youth from an engineering college. They were only interested in showing their palms to me and wanting to know their future through palmistry. Finally, I told them that it was better they focused on using their hands for working, which will get them success, rather than being much bothered about the lines in their palms. There are very few seekers among the youth.

#### Celibacy

I lay a lot of emphasis on brahmacharya. If you do not preserve the sacred seed, how will there be grace and light on your face? When the seed is preserved and utilized for a higher cause, then we see there is a certain grace and light on the face of the person. A regulated and disciplined daily life is a must

for maintaining brahmacharya. Sometimes students tell me their memory fails them. I tell them to observe brahmacharya and see how their memory improves.

#### Women

Our scriptures say that where women are worshipped, devatas roam.

Ramayana AND Mahabharata happened because of the disrespectful behavior meted out to Sita and Draupadi. Something similar happened recently, when a girl was raped in Delhi and all those powerful and educated people were helpless to save her honor.

THIS WAS JUST ONE EXAMPLE. Besides this there have been so many incidents of injustice done to women. Crimes against women are happening on a big scale, while only a few are highlighted by the media. The rest do not get much attention and prominence.

THE BIG POSITIVE CHANGE AFTER the Delhi rape case is that people have become awakened, and now they have decided to raise their voice in a big way. However, women also must maintain a certain code of



Also known as Swami Atma-premananda, Mahant Ghan-shyam Giri is a saint of the Juna Akhara based in Himachal Pradesh

conduct, which will strengthen them, make them more empowered and get them better respect overall.

VRINDAVAN

### “Proud I Am a Hindu”

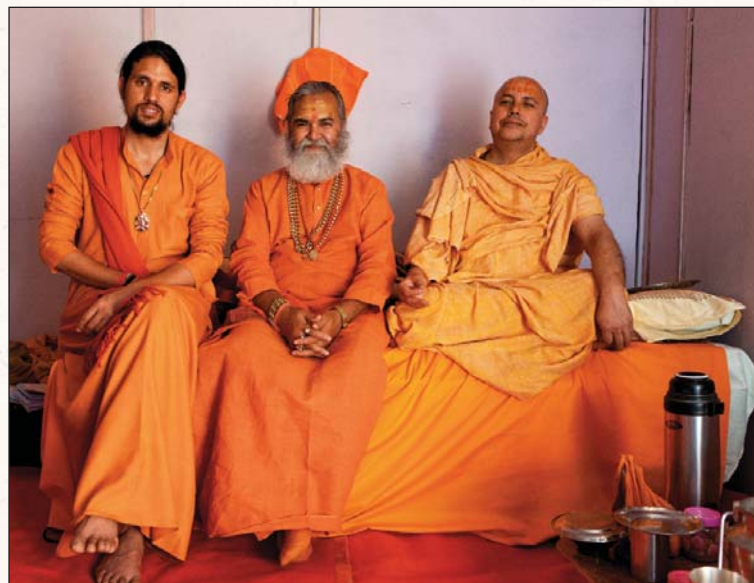
IN THE PAST, WHEN TRAVEL WAS difficult, the Kumbh Mela was mainly a gathering of top saints and acharyas as a symbol of unity. They would consider the various problems faced at district, state and village levels. Are our daughters and mothers being victimized? Is there an attack on our Vedic culture and literature? If the problem was among the intellectuals, then the intellectual saints of very high level were sent. If it was with the common people, then those adept in bhajans and kirtans would go and improve the situation. This is how the traditions of our Sanatana Dharma were kept alive by our top seers through these Kumbh Melas. Today only around 65 percent of

the pilgrims are deeply religious and have come here with total devotion, while the remaining 35 percent have come to the event in the spirit of a mela or a fair.

#### Pollution of the Ganga

For this mela, the message is that the saints and pilgrims here are highly concerned about the pollution of our Mother Ganga. This can be solved only when each and every Hindu becomes aware of it and keeps their local small rivers and tributaries free of pollution. The quality and quantity of water in successive Kumbh Melas is under severe pressure. The time has come to take this matter very seriously.

Swami Gopal Sharan Devacharya (interviewed, at right) of the Nimbarka Sampradaya with Mahant Keshav Puri (center) of Mumbai and Swami Ananda Giri (left)



All Hindus must join this movement to clean Ganga.

#### Proud to Be Hindu

I will end by saying I am proud that I am an Indian and I am

proud that I am a Hindu. I salute our men and women who, once married before the Fire God, remain with each other throughout their life.

## Pilgrim Voices

MUMBAI

### “Super Power In Prayag”

IT IS AMAZING TO SEE THE FAITH and devotion people have for our religion. This morning I was reluctant to have a bath, thinking the water quality might be poor because of the big rush. But when I reached the bathing area, I found that the water quality was fairly good. I had a good holy dip. The most amazing experience was seeing the procession of naga sadhus who were coming from Sangam after having a holy bath. Their age was from

10 to 90 years. While we were wearing so many clothes and still feeling cold, these people were walking almost naked. For sure there is some super power in Prayag—so many things are taking place here and the energy level is so high. These initiates were sitting in the cold, but we could see peace and tranquility on their faces. Everyone must visit a Kumbh Mela at least once in their lifetime.



Devjeet and Nita Datta

DELHI

### “Immersed In God”

AFTER EXPERIENCING THIS Kumbh, we feel that had we not participated in it we would have committed a big blunder. Such a mega-event cannot be organized without the blessings of God Himself, and I salute the Uttar Pradesh government. What we have spent to be here is immaterial. Personally, I believe one should spend at least ten percent of one's income on activities connected to our religion. All other expenses we incur are of little worth. The kind of strong spiritual vibrations that are here right now can be experienced nowhere else in the world. Pilgrims from all over are rushing here to have a bath in the confluence of three rivers. They have forgotten their physical existence and are immersed in God. They just want

to have the bath, and then spend time singing bhajans and doing meditation at this powerful, holy place. Here we have got so easily a jewel of our life. This is usually difficult to obtain, but here in Prayag it is available to anyone.



Shri Bhupinder Singh Yadav works for the Border Security Force



Jonathan, second from left, a lawyer with his friends from Israel

ISRAEL

### “There's Nothing Like This In Our Country”

I HAVE NEVER SEEN ANYTHING like this before. It is amazing to see how so many people believe in the same thing and are doing the same thing with such great belief. My friends are in shock. They told me just a few minutes ago that for them it is a dream to be here and experience this. It is

something beyond their imagination. In our country, Israel, there is nothing like this. Maybe 20 percent are religious, and they go to a synagogue and pray. But there is nothing like this where people gather in such large numbers and celebrate a festival together.



Deepak, a professional astrologer, with his wife Karuna

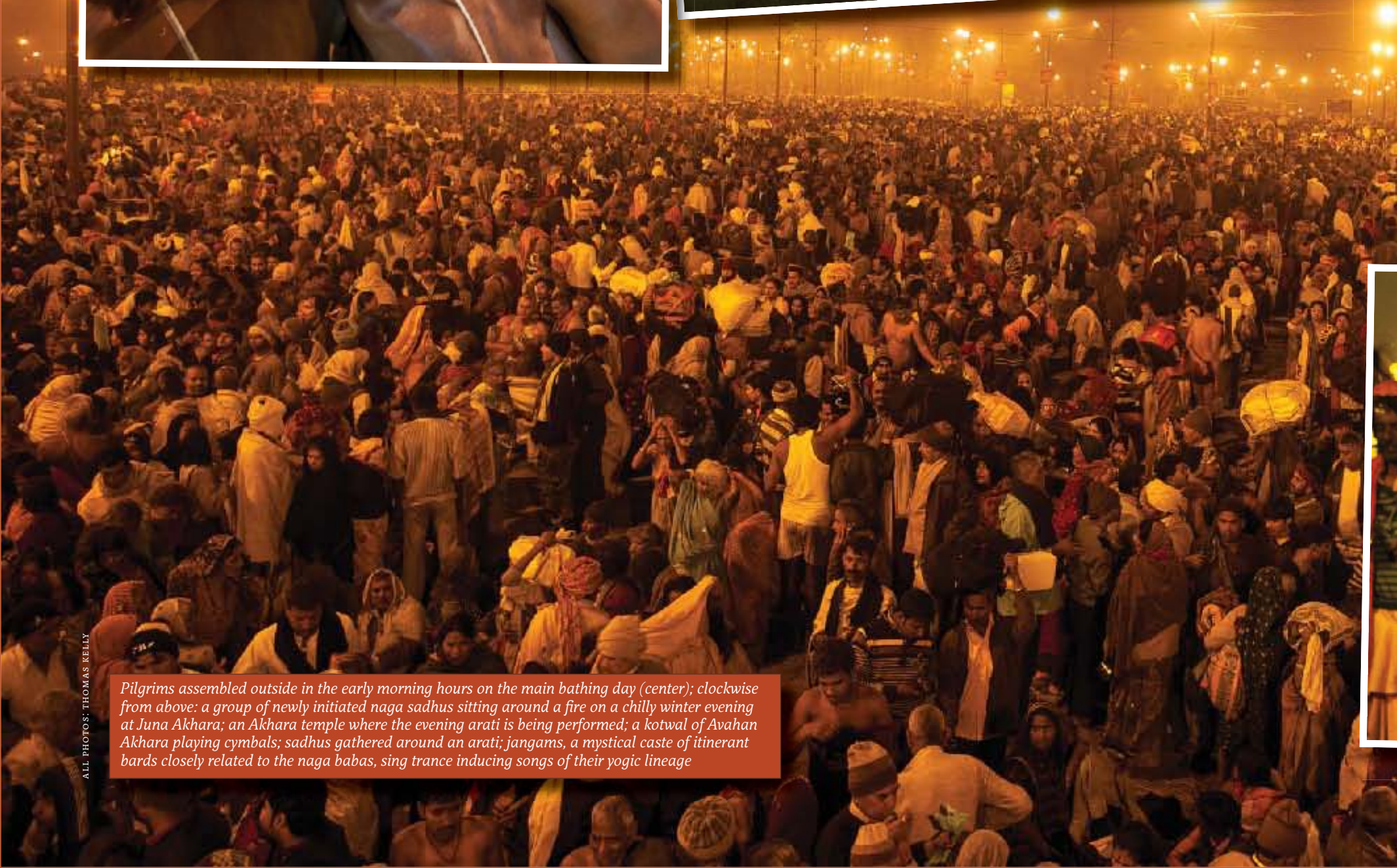
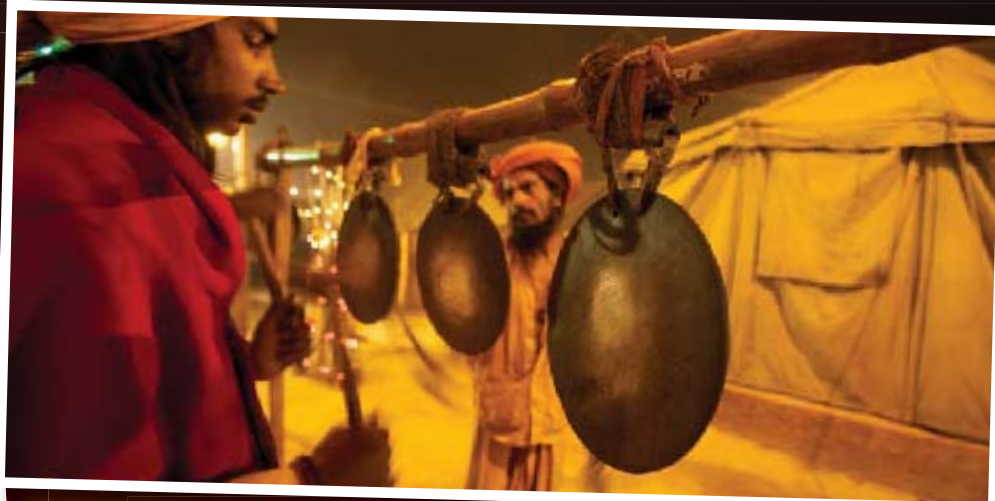
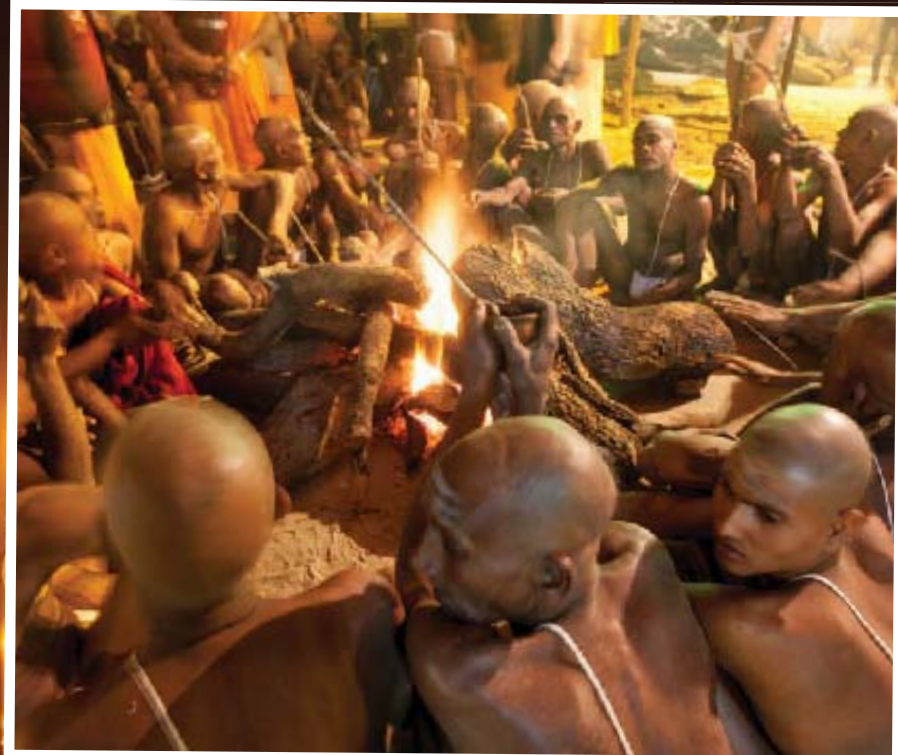
MUMBAI

### “See at Least Some Miracle”

WE ARE WANDERING HERE TO meet some truly realized saints and get their divine blessings. We cannot go to the caves where the saints stay after the Kumbh, but we can definitely try to meet them when they are here after a gap of twelve years. We are looking for a saint who can tell us about our lives and show us some miracles, too. So

far this has not happened, but I am sure we will get to see at least some miracle before we end our visit. So far, we get up in the morning, have a bath in Ganga and then spend the day touching the feet and having darshan of the holy men whose camps we are visiting. I think these saints are themselves incarnations of various Gods and Goddesses.





Pilgrims assembled outside in the early morning hours on the main bathing day (center); clockwise from above: a group of newly initiated naga sadhus sitting around a fire on a chilly winter evening at Juna Akhara; an Akhara temple where the evening arati is being performed; a kotwal of Avahan Akhara playing cymbals; sadhus gathered around an arati; jangams, a mystical caste of itinerant bards closely related to the naga babas, sing trance inducing songs of their yogic lineage

ALL PHOTOS: THOMAS KELLY





## VHP Calls for Action on Ram Temple, Women, Ganga

**O**N THURSDAY, FEBRUARY SEVENTH THE VISHWA HINDU parishad held an immense Sant Mahasammelan (gathering of saints) at the camp of Swami Vasudevananda on the Kumbh grounds. It was a raucous affair, with the thousands in attendance shouting, "Jai Shri Ram" and "Har Har Mahadev" every few minutes throughout the speeches. The media was present in full force at this most political of all Kumbh events—half a dozen broadcast vans were parked outside, incidentally blocking an important road. The saints on stage, dressed in every hue of saffron robes (with a few in white as well), represented most of the main Hindu lineages and akharas. The tents, curtains and flags on the dais were all saffron.

The five-hour affair dealt with issues pressed by the VHP for years, including the construction of a new Ram temple in Ayodhya. Swami Ramanandacharya pleaded, "All of us live in air-conditioned places, and our Lord Ram lives in a tented accommodation [set up after the masjid on the site was torn down in 1992]." Saint after saint echoed his plea, many calling for political action.

Mahamandaleshwar Vijyogananda Ji Maharaj introduced a resolution calling for protection of the Ganga. "The truth is," he lamented, "that the river has lost its identity due to this heavy pollution." Sadhvi Pragya Bharti read out a resolution on the status of women. "The increase in cases of rapes, female infanticide, domestic violence, dowry problem and eve teasing are a big concern for the fraternity of saints. The society in which women are not respected is not a civilized society." The resolution called for moral education in school, banning of indecent portrayal of women on TV and in advertisements and the death penalty for rape. All resolutions were passed with the chanting of "Aum." As the meeting ended, there was a great rush of devotees to touch the feet of the revered saints.

**Call for action:** (above) the famed blind swami Jagadguru Ramabhadracharya addresses an extraordinary array of religious leaders, including the Shankaracharya of Kanchi Peetham (seated in a chair at left), gathered on stage for the event; sadhus and devotees in attendance





## Voices of the Saints

MADHYA PRADESH

### “Our Unity in Diversity”

SOME PEOPLE OF OTHER RELIGIONS believe and often emphasize that they have one holy book and one God. At the same time they highlight that those belonging to Sanatana Dharma believe in a number of scriptures and books and also a number of Gods—implying we are not united. For all such people this Kumbh gives an appropriate reply. Here people belonging to different castes and spiritual lineages, different countries and often different ways of thinking have come to have a collective holy dip in the Triveni and worship Bhagwan

Suryanarayan, the Sun God. It is here you get to view our unity in diversity. This is the majestic form of Sanatana Dharma.

#### Youth

A lot of university students come to us to ask questions about their various projects and assignments. I have told them the influence of Western civilization upon them is increasingly apparent, but at the same time Westerners are being influenced by us, and in a big way—I see them here at the mela moving about in Indian dress, some with shaven heads even.

#### Women

Because of inadequate education, devotion to mother, father, religion and country is lessening. I tell the young girls coming to

me about the kind of respect they should get in this country, respect which is not found anywhere else in the world. Our scriptures say, “Where women are worshiped, the Gods are present.” When our daughters are small, we worship them in Kumari Puja. When they are married, again they are worshipped in Suvashini Puja. Married women are taken as the embodiment of Goddess Jagdamba.

When it comes to men, only one’s own father is called “Father.” Other male relatives are called “Uncle.” But in the case of elderly women, everyone calls them “Mother.” If a father’s son becomes a sannyasin, then the father does pranam and touches his sannyasin son’s feet. But in the case of the mother, the son touches her feet even after sannyas. Even if the son becomes a Shankaracharya, still he touches the feet of his mother. This country has had eminent women of

*Agni Peethadhishwar Acharya Mahamandaleswar Shri Ramkrishnanand Ji Maharaj, Head of Sri Panchadashnam Panchagni Akhara*

stature like Anusuya, Maitri, Gargi, Sita and Savitri. Our girls should follow their path. It is the women of India that have given birth to Ramanujacharyas, Ramanandacharyas, Nimbarkacharyas and Vallabhacharyas. Such is the prestige of women in this country.

I tell the college girls who come to me to wear graceful, traditional clothes and not blindly emulate the Western clothing, which is not graceful. We would like our girls to follow the traditional and moral values of our culture and heritage. This will certainly lead to more respect and the betterment of our nation and society.

PHOTO: RAJIV MALIK

## Pilgrim Voices

GERMANY

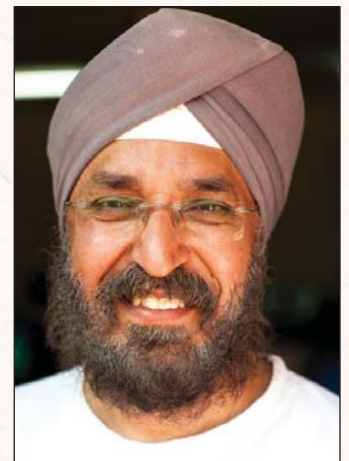
### “Their Faith Is Anchored at Sangam”

TEACH INDOLOGY. THAT IS WHY I am here at the Kumbh, to cover the aspects of the modern religiosity in Hinduism. I’ve been a board member of VHP in Germany for almost 12 years. It is quite positive here. There is no perfect organization, and

we should understand that. A perfect organization would be flawless, and it is not flawless. The police are extremely polite and well trained. In general, information technology has been used well, and they have tried to maintain cleanliness, though the sanitary conditions are not good.

Kumbh is not affordable for most foreigners. The tented accommodation being offered by the UP Tourism is us\$261 per day. Foreigners cannot understand why a government agency has put its prices so high.

I have great regard for the silent majority of pilgrims from rural areas. They are completely dedicated and surrendered. The greatest pleasure in the Kumbh is that it is an affordable destination even for the poor of this country. They might be traveling thousands of kilometers in ordinary buses or by cheapest train class. They face difficult situations, yet the whole of their *astha*, faith, is anchored on just one shore, the holy water of Sangam. It is a pleasure watching the youth come here in big numbers, both from rich families and poor families. There is a tremendous momentum in youth with the renaissance of Hinduism and Hindu philosophy.



*Professor Ajit Sikand of the Department of Indology, Mainz University, Frankfurt*



*Shivam Bharti, graduate student from Uttar Pradesh*

LUCKNOW

### “Bliss Difficult to Explain”

THE WHOLE ARRANGEMENT here is so good. The security is excellent. The kind of bliss we experienced after having a dip in Mother Ganga is something very difficult for us to explain. This is the first time we have come to attend the Kumbh, though we have come to Sangam many times in the past. I am a man of science, but I also believe our religion has a lot to do with science. In fact, the scholars related to our religion first talked about science. Last night we went to

different akharas and met the saints belonging to different sects.

*Jaydeep's wife Ritu adds:* THE message we got from the naga babas and other saints was that they are also a part of the society and should not be treated in any different manner. The naga babas told us they were here as members of our society, and therefore we must treat them as family members only. When they are in the jungles and caves, their duty is to do penance. But

they are here at the Kumbh mela to interact with Hindu society. Last night, when we visited the akharas, it was very cold. We were all wearing a lot of woollens, but most of the saints were wearing very few clothes or even naked. They have extraordinary powers that they can brave the winter weather without any proper clothing. We were under the impression that the place would be extremely overcrowded, and so we deliberately avoided bringing our kids. Now we are repenting for not bringing them and their missing this once-in-a-lifetime experience.

KANNAUJ

### “Opportunity to Learn”

I AM HERE WITH MY FRIENDS TO gather knowledge about my Hindu religion. I belong to a family of farmers. It seems everything is happening here perhaps as it was written in our *Vedas*. The biggest realization I’ve had is that there is no caste discrimination here. Everyone is propagating and serving Sanatana Dharma. To the people back home, I suggest everyone come and experience the Kumbh. It is a great opportunity to learn about our religion in depth and about how scientific our Hindu dharma is.



*Dr. Jaydeep Chandra (center right), a neurosurgeon, with wife Ritu*

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: RAJIV MALIK; THOMAS KELLY; RAJIV MALIK



# “Putting an End to Untouchability...”

... so that all may share the temples, the well, the pond and the dining table”

One hundred women from Rajasthan came to the Kumbh with the singular goal of ending the stigma of untouchability caused by their work as scavengers handling human waste. They were present through the efforts of Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak, founder of Sulabh International, an India-based social service organization which promotes human rights, sanitation, non-conventional energy, waste management and social reforms through education. This is what Dr. Pathak had to say about his social campaign:

**A**S A CHILD, I ONCE TOUCHED AN UNTOUCHABLE. FOR THIS infraction I was forced by my grandmother to swallow cow dung as a punishment. I was also made to drink cow urine and bathe in Ganga water to purify myself. This experience ingrained in me what untouchability was in the minds of my community. These women here with me at the Kumbh once cleaned human excrement from toilets, and this made them Untouchables. They had to wear bells around their necks to warn families of their approach. They were forbidden from going to the temple, doing puja, even bathing in the Ganga. They never used to come here to Sangam for the Kumbh. Their children could only play with the pigs and not with children of higher castes.

## Solving the Underlying Cause

In trying to fulfill the dreams of Mahatma Gandhi, I have been experimenting with the removal of untouchability. We have started with the towns of Tonk and Alwar in Rajasthan. We first installed Sulabh composting toilets, eliminating the need for manual waste removal and relieving the women from this degrading occupation. We then set up a training institute in Rajasthan and taught each woman a vocation, such as making papadums, tailoring, weaving carpets or doing cosmetics, thereby enabling them to stand on their own two feet. Now they are going to the same houses where they used to clean toilets, and are instead selling products or providing cosmetic services.

Uplifting someone economically can be easy, but creating acceptance in mainstream society can be a real challenge. We worked to have these women intermingle with the world at large. We worked to give them the *sanskars* (a sacrament or rite done to mark a significant transition of life) of the higher castes, by which they could gain equality. I feel that this is the biggest thing we have done for them. Before this change, being a guest in higher-caste home was for them impossible. We prepared these women to sit together with higher castes and sort things out, with no feeling of animosity on either side. Today these women are one hundred percent accepted by the very same people who once considered them Untouchables. They socialize together, exchange gifts and even share meals. In Tonk and Alwar we have completely eliminated untouchability. It has worked. Anyone can go there and see it. In India we have so many social organizations. If each of them could adopt just one village and work to bring about these caste reforms, then the whole of India would change. This is how a revolution can come about.



Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak: Founder of Sulabh International

## The Key Role of Brahmins

Part of our focus has been to inspire a greater feeling of bhakti towards God. Now we are working to encourage brahmins to perform pujas for these women and their families, to offer them prasadam and to have food with them. Then even in the villages this untouchability will disappear. Our slogan is: “Everyone should go to the temple, everyone should bathe in the same pond, everyone should have access to the same well water, and all must have food together.” These are the four things to be done. These are also the four indicators by which you can judge how well untouchability has been eradicated in an area. We are asking brahmins to come forward and take the initiative, since even today many brahmins will not sit and eat with them. Unless brahmins conduct prayers and accept food from these women, then the evil of untouchability will linger.

There can be different definitions of God. All Gods, whether of Hindus, Muslims or Christians, are Gods because of the faith of the people. But the real God is He who creates the jiva. I say, “It is He who has created us all, and there should be no social inequality. It is the duty of every Hindu to tear apart this inhumane injustice.”

## Uniting for Change

All that I have done is due to the inspiration I took from Gandhiji. The discrimination these former Untouchables used to face existed for a very long time before he came on the scene. He was the first person to draw attention to their plight. Untouchability has now been banned by the government, but the stark reality is that it still exists. I feel very connected with these former Untouchables. When they laugh, I laugh; when they weep, I also weep. When they tell us their stories of how they were insulted by society, tears begin to flow.

A brahmin recently asked a former untouchable woman to perform his daughter's *kanya daan* (the giving of the daughter during the marriage ceremony). This is the kind of change that is blooming in the minds of the people. Today, at my village in the Vaishali district of Bihar, people of all castes sit together and eat. This unity is what we need. All these people are a part of our Hindu society and should not be segregated.

To create change, we must unite. We want our politicians, social workers and industrialists to come forward and help in this movement. This is a grand work, and by no means a small job. I am happy to have taken a first step. Though I alone cannot do everything for this cause, at least we have shown the world a path. Now no one can say it's impossible.

We know what we can do together. Wherever you are in the world, your life is successful if you can transform not just your own life, but those of others as well.



## Casting Off Caste: Village scavengers stand transformed by Mother Ganga



(clockwise from above) Dr. Pathak and this group of former scavenger women celebrate after their first-ever ceremonial bath in the Ganga to remove their status as Untouchables; sharing a meal with brahmins and sadhus—Dr. Pathak believes sharing meals to be absolutely necessary in order to completely eliminate untouchability; the reeducated scavenger women sing and clap on their way to the Ganga for the bath; gathering on the dais with swamis who endorsed their new status





## Voices of Non-Hindus

DELHI

### “Ganga Being Worshipped Is Beautiful”

THERE IS A STRONG FEELING about this Kumbh that it is a peaceful religious occasion and that politics should be kept out of it. There is no tension about Ram Mandir, which was present in the previous Melas.

#### Pilgrims

I have been overawed by the pilgrims, especially the kalpavasis, who are living here. They tolerate conditions which are not good, and yet they are full of praise for the government for looking after them. Their patience and peacefulness is an example to all of us, as is that of the people now flooding into the Kumbh Mela, 95 percent of whom come on foot, mostly

from the rural areas. I fear that in the future, as India urbanizes, the Kumbh will become less peaceful and more full of tension brought by the way of life of the urban people, who are impatient and demanding their rights.

#### The Media

People expect too much from the media. We are trying to get the spiritual message of the Kumbh, because otherwise we cannot explain why the people are coming here. It is such an unusual spectacle, which is what attracts the media—the naga sadhus and the huge variety of Hinduism on show. Those people who want to know more about the spiritual side of it should read magazines like HINDUISM TODAY. You cannot expect in-depth spirituality from a daily newspaper, much less from a television show.

#### His Christian Viewpoint

I have an unusual view for a

Christian: I welcome every other religion. As a Christian, I have my own ways on rituals and things like that. I did not think it necessary for me to have a bath in Sangam.

I am not that devout a Christian. I wish I were more devout. When I first came to India as an adult, I was a very orthodox Christian. I believed that there was only one way to God and that was through Christianity. Then I was deeply influenced by India's openmindedness, and I no longer regard Christianity as the one and only way to God.

#### Ganga Arati

I did participate in the Ganga Arati. I was standing there and was asked to come to the front. I was reluctant, as I felt I had no business to be at the front. I have been a witness of it in the past, too, sitting in the back—even when I am in church I like to sit in the back. But I was called forward, and suddenly the arati light was put in my hands to



Mark Tully was born in Calcutta, British India, in 1935, raised in UK and returned to India in 1965 as a correspondent for the BBC

offer to Ganga. It was a great honor for me, one I will never forget, because it was in such beautiful surroundings on the banks of Sangam. I could see all the bright lights twinkling, of this huge great tented city. I think this concept, Ganga is your mother and Ganga is being worshipped, is a beautiful concept.

LOS ANGELES

### “Primal and Powerful Event”

I'VE BEEN HERE NOW FOR THREE weeks, but only over the last two or three days, as we get closer to February 10, is the enormity of it becoming manifest. Suddenly there are huge crowds of people walking the streets with their bags on their heads, so many that you can't even drive a car on the road. I've never seen anything with this power anywhere in the world, and I've been to many places for many big events. You hear repeatedly how enormous it all is, but there's no imagining it until you see it.

Honestly, my feelings about the Kumbh run the gamut. First, I see the very poor people who are devoted and God fearing,

who come here for that spirituality and purification. They come because of their fundamental beliefs, and they come in huge numbers. Then I see the very rich, who come to give thanks for what they have. Then there are the sadhus, who come to be with a lot of people like themselves, in an event that's very primal and powerful.

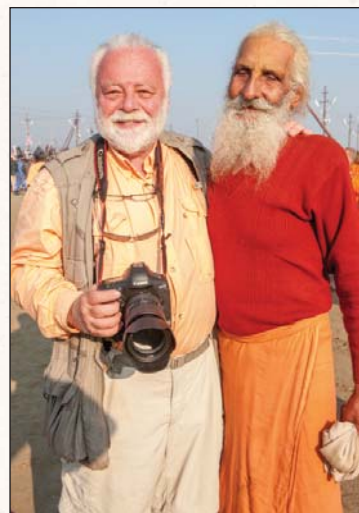
#### The Sadhus

Most powerful for me has been the time I've spent with the sadhus, listening to them talk about their general beliefs, their religion, philosophy of life and the way their lives have been conducted. It has reinforced in me the feelings I had about my own life and how I conduct myself. I've learned about people who are willing to completely dedicate their life to their beliefs and their philosophies. They are people with vast knowledge and great sensitivity. A lot of the sadhus I've met are simple

country people, but just as dedicated and committed as the very big and evolved sadhus. It's impossible not to respect them.

#### Photographing the Nagas

To a foreigner, the nagas seem like a very fine concept. Many of them are warriors, as has been explained to me. All of them, to me, seem very aggressive. I was suspicious because they do not allow you to take a picture of them without paying money. This is an impossible environment for me to photograph in. It's a commercial relationship. I'm not being myself, and they are not being themselves. When I've gone to a village in Rajasthan, Gujarat, Odisha or Madhya Pradesh, I sit with people for three or four days, go to their house, have tea with them. When I finally take a picture, there is a relationship, and the picture reflects that relationship. Here, when I give money, what do I get in return? Am I getting



Fredric Roberts, 70, is a professional photographer who spent six weeks at the Kumbh

a person who's posing because he's been paid to pose, or do I get the essence of the person? That's the dilemma for me as a photographer.

## Voices of the Saints

HARIDWAR

### “Divine and Spiritual Souls Here”

I AM THE CHIEF MAHANT OF THE akhara for the Purab Pangat, Assembly of the East. We have four mahants, one for each direction. Ours is a Vaishnav akhara. We have over ten thousand saints. We organize free kitchens, promote vegetarianism and run Sanskrit schools. Here at the mela we are feeding seven thousand people a day. Udasin means indifference. We are living in the world, yet we are indifferent to worldly things.

#### Value of Religious Company

Not only our Indians, but all the people of the world should come in touch with the divine

and spiritual souls here from whom they can get good *sanskars* (cultural and religious impressions). When you spend time in the company of realized spiritual masters and get positive thoughts and messages from them, then you will also do good things in society. If you do not come in touch with holy people, then how can your thoughts be good? Just being in their company is not sufficient; you must also follow the good path that they show you. By visiting the Kumbh Mela you get four advantages: having the darshan of saints, being in their divine company, donating at such a pious occasion and meeting so many other pilgrims.

#### Youth

Our youth have to be connected to the world through the Internet; if they are not, they will lag behind. There is no harm in it.



Mukhiya Mahant Shri Dharam Das of Shri Panchayat Akhara Naya Udasin Nirvan at his camp with fellow monks

When nature changes, how can you can keep yourself unchanged? If our children do not learn to operate computers, they will not be able to work. True, the life of our youth is a bit disturbed due to the night shifts in the information technology industry. However, so far as worshipping of God is concerned, one can remember God

when one is traveling, walking or even lying down. A change in the life style should not affect the remembrance of God. If we cannot go to the temple, we can do puja using our mind. We can even offer the best and costliest things we wish to, mentally. Mental worship has the same significance as physical worship.

PRAYAG

### “Children Lack Energy”

IN ANCIENT TIMES THE NECTAR fell out of the war that was held between the good forces and evil forces, and the benefit of that nectar is being made available to humanity even today. There are people who have doubts about everything and raise questions about everything. We do not want to enter into an argument, as we are people who worship stones, cows, trees and rivers. They are all treated by us as our Gods. So we do not feel that we have an argument with anyone about our devatas. Ours is a unique culture, and we are very happy to be a part of it.

At this auspicious time of the mela, the first God to be available is Lord Surya. Then comes Lord Brihaspati and then Lord Chandra. Surya (the Sun) is the symbol of energy and power.

Brahaspati (Jupiter) is a symbol of knowledge and renunciation. Chandra (the Moon) is a symbol of the nectar. The rays of the Sun fall on Jupiter and Jupiter's renunciation falls on Moon—that is the moment which comes once in twelve years and is called Purna Kumbh Mela. It is to enjoy this moment that not only people from India and abroad but even the rishis who stay in the mountain caves come here. After having a bath in this confluence of three rivers, Triveni, they feel blessed and extremely fortunate. Once in a lifetime one must experience Kumbh, and especially bring the children along so that our culture and our dharma continues to be like this forever.

#### Vegetarianism

Often I tell the youth why they should be vegetarians. Sometimes they do not know the difference between a vegetarian and nonvegetarian diet, because they do not know that we have to kill animals to have meat.

When I tell them animals are killed for them to eat, they become remorseful and promise me that from then onwards they will never eat meat. Our Gods and our rishis created 56 types of food made out of vegetables. After eating a particular dish, we should only eat it again after two months. So many flavors and varieties of food exist only in our cuisine.

#### Brahmacharya

It is that power through which one can achieve anything that one wants in one's life. Today children lack energy. Their faces are sad, their eyes are weak and their hair is falling out. They do not have good thoughts coming to them, and that is the reason they are frustrated and



Swami Ananda Giri, administrator of the famed Lete Bade Hanuman Mandir at Sangam

not at peace with themselves. They are living at such a fast pace that their worldly life is becoming a hell. If you ask them, they say they are just surviving and not living happily.



## Pilgrim Voices

NEW YORK

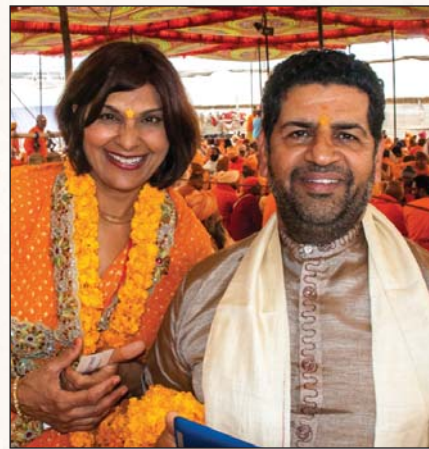
### “Rare Saints of Such Stature”

WE WENT TO THE 2010 Kumbh in Haridwar, but this is something really amazing. Ganga is a *mokshadayani*, grantor of liberation, you can say. Every morning we go to Sangam, have our holy dip, do our puja and only then start our day.

Both our children follow our Hindu traditions, but getting them married is a problem. They are pure hearted and honest, and this is something not so easily found here in India in the young generation. Though our culture is rich, we lack honesty; and this is one thing which is going from bad to worse here in India. We are looking for pure *Bhartiya*—the best of India—matches for our children. It may sound strange, but it is easier to get such matches back in the US. The reason is that the young people there are not learning dharma

under pressure; they do it out of free will. We have yet to find pure-hearted Indians for them.

*Neelam Sandhir:* Every time I have a holy dip in the Mother Ganga I feel the presence of God on this holy land. The same feeling comes to us when we have the darshan of our holy saints. It is rare to have saints of such stature in such big numbers anywhere else.



*Vijay and Neelam Sandhir*

LUCKNOW

### “One Who Has Not Come Here Has Not Seen Anything”

WHEN I CAME TO THE KUMBH 24 years ago as a child, we drove straight to the ghat and had our bath. There was hardly any security and fewer people. Those were simple days. Today it is a sea of humanity. A lot of change has taken place, and the faith of the people in the event has increased. We visited the different akharas, which was an out-of-the-world experience for our group. It is very difficult to convey what I have seen here. I can only say that whosoever has missed this opportunity has missed a lot. In fact, the one who is not here has not seen anything.



*Girish Agarwal, a businessman*



*Thakur Dev Lal, 65, a farmer*

RAJASTHAN

### “At the Feet of Mother Ganga”

I LOVE HAVING A BATH IN GANGA. If possible, I do so several times a day. It is my biggest enjoyment here. Here at this book stall I am looking for a *Ramayana* to take home. Every time I go to a religious fair, I buy at least one book which I then read daily after my morning prayer. I have come by

train and without reservations. I am staying at the ashram of Manjhle Murari Bapu who is also of Rajasthan. I am comfortable, because my expectations are very low. I take it as a pilgrimage, where I get to touch the feet of Holy Mother Ganga and worship Her.



*Shikhar Chand Sahoo, 62, at center, is a farmer in Sivni District, MP*

MADHYA PRADESH

### “Our Stay is Blissful”

WE ARE A GROUP OF TEN AND have traveled about 700 kilometers by road with a big vehicle to participate in the Kumbh. The older people in our group have been to the other Kumbhs, but for the youth and children, it is a first-time experience. We came last night and will be staying here for a few

more days, having our bath on the 10th. We are staying in a tent put up by our priest, who hails from Ayodhya. We are not facing any problem here, and our stay is blissful.

We would be spending around US\$185 on the transport. Total per-head expense would be around \$37 to \$56.

## Voices: Kumbh Officials

PRAYAG

### “Our Team is Fully Committed to Pilgrims”

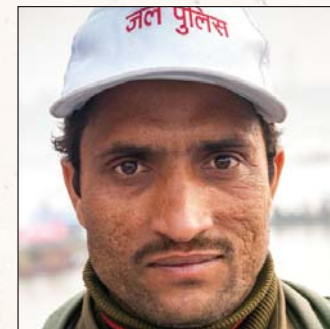
THIS CENTRAL HOSPITAL HAS 100 beds. In addition, there are 14 more with 20 beds each set up in the different sectors. We have a staff of 150 doctors. There are 20 first-aid posts

with paramedics and pharmacists, plus 100 ambulances. All operate around the clock. Here in the central hospital we attended to 1,580 patients yesterday. Throughout our system we treated 6,772 patients today, which is a normal number. To date (February 1), we have examined over 141,000 patients.

Just one in a hundred has to be admitted or sent to a hospital in the city. We are operating well under our capacity. Here, for example, only 30 beds out of the hundred are occupied. Most



*Dr. Major B.P. Singh, Joint Director of the Kumbh Mela Medical Facilities*



*Ram Asre Pandey*

ALLAHABAD

### “Ensuring a Safe Holy Dip”

I AM A MEMBER OF THE RIVER police and an expert swimmer. Our thousands of river police personnel are everywhere on the ghats, ensuring that the pilgrims have a safe holy dip. With the grace of God, everything is going well, and I have seen no instances of drowning. The water level has been kept low. This is a great opportunity for us to serve the pilgrims. I am feeling so blessed that I could have many holy dips during this Kumbh.

ALLAHABAD

### “Remarkable Faith Cannot Be Explained”

TO HAVE A BATH AT SANGAM, most pilgrims had to walk from one to fifteen kilometers. As they were leaving, we diverted them through a longer route, as we did not want a heavy rush at the railway station. We wanted them to get there in numbers that could be easily accommodated in the trains available there. So far we have been able to manage the whole affair smoothly, without any serious problems. [A few hours later, a stampede caused by mismanagement occurred at the crowded railway station and 35 people were killed.]

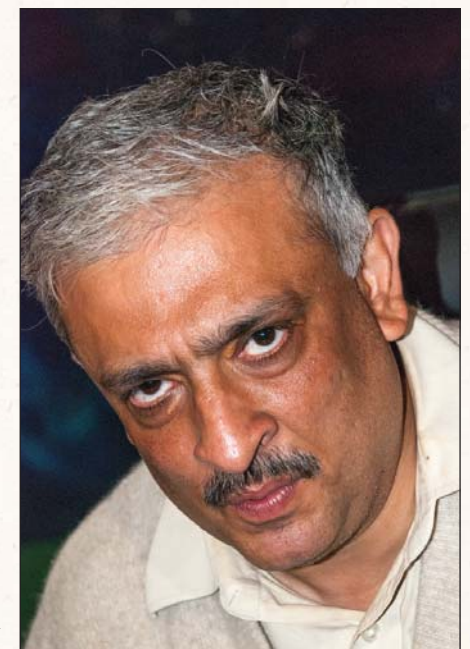
The fact that the mela area was spread over a vast space has been to our advantage, and that is the reason the roads are so broad. The wide roads ensure that even when tens of millions of people are there, we are not facing situations in which a



*Srimahant Jageshwar Das Mahatyati at the Kumbh central hospital*

patients are either very young or very old and suffering from asthma, cough and cold. There have been cases of heart attack and fractures, and two patients have died. I advise pilgrims to wear proper woolen clothes so as to not catch colds, and to keep a slightly wet piece of cloth covering their nose, especially

for those with asthma. I am really grateful to the government for assigning this job to me. The government is paying me wages to earn punya (good merit) by working during this holy event. My team is fully dedicated and committed to provide the best services to the pilgrims who come to us with health problems.



*Devesh Chaturvedi, Kumbh Mela Commissioner*

experiences and feelings. I personally will have a dip once it is all over.





Pilgrims assembled outside the lost and found camp await reuniting with their relatives.

## One Family's Mission: Reuniting lost pilgrims

Each year, thousands of pilgrims get lost or separated from their families and friends at the Kumbh. Mistakenly parted for but a moment, they quickly disappear into the countless faces and voices of the oceanic crowds. Thankfully, 86-year-old Rajaram Tiwari has made it his life's mission to help as many people as possible reunite with their loved ones. Mr. Tiwari's lost and found camp, Bhule Bhatke Shivir, is one of several such camps, but his is by far the largest and most active. Half century ago with just twelve other people he began the service. Today the Kumbh administration provides the land for the lost and found, as well as the use of an announcement booth from where they can broadcast throughout the whole area.

Although his camp has not started using the Internet for connecting pilgrims, some other institutions are experimenting with it, and reporting good results. Mobile phones have made it easy for those who have them to be reunited. Now the majority of people who arrive at Tiwari's camp are those who don't use mobile phones, such as young children and

the elderly. While lost pilgrims wait, volunteers serve them food and tea, and even provide travel fare to those in need.

When asked about stories of people abandoning their elderly at the Kumbh, Mr. Tiwari countered, "It is simply not true. This notion is completely baseless. Pilgrims bring elderly to the Sangam ghat with a lot of care and reverence, trying to fulfill their wish of having a holy dip in Mother Ganga. How could such devout children abandon their parents here? None of the people I've helped are ever separated permanently. All of them, elderly or young, are eventually reunited with their families." At the last Kumbh, the camp helped over 80,000 people. In Mr. Tiwari's 68 years of running lost and found camps during the Kumbh, Ardha Kumbh and Magh melas, he has reunited over 1,200,000 people with their families and friends.

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People in search of their loved ones dictate their names to a volunteer for the public address announcement; Rajajram Tewari, 86, founded the camp 68 years ago

ALL PHOTOS: THOMAS KELLY



## Pilgrim Voices

UNITED KINGDOM

### "I Am Being Transformed"

SHRAVAN PODDAR: THIS IS THE first time I am visiting a Kumbh Mela. I was born in Bihar, but my family is from Rajasthan. I have lived in Glasgow, UK, since 1967. Staying at the Kumbh with Guruji is a unique experience. Every moment new things are happening. I feel I am being transformed

Sunita Poddar: SEEING PEOPLE in such big numbers overwhelms me, as they all have so much faith in their God and their traditions. In 2010 I participated in the Haridwar Kumbh. At first

I was so scared because of the heavy rush, but then I felt as if God was personally taking care of me. There was a great rush that morning at the bathing ghat, but when I arrived, it suddenly slowed so we could have a leisurely bath. My experience there was very divine and unique. Today we will take the holy dip in the divine company of Guruji. With his blessings, our children are also good Hindus and pure vegetarians. We are associated with a Radha Krishna temple in Glasgow as trustees.



Shravan Kumar, an engineer, and Sunita Poddar seek the blessings of Swami Gopal Sharan Devacharya of Golokdham, Delhi



Akhil Kapoor (center), Shiva Malani and Varun

MUMBAI

### "Questions on Reality"

WE ARE HERE BECAUSE WE want to learn about spirituality and connect it to the life we live. I have questions about

reality and consciousness, as we ourselves are living in a material world. I am getting very interesting answers. Here these people

DELHI

### "Expensive"

I HAVE COME WITH A BIG GROUP of foreign tourists, mostly professionals. We have been preparing and planning for this trip for the past two years. Most of my clients are from Belgium and Italy. They are amazed to see so many people gathering at one place. Our clients came here to attend the first royal bath. Now

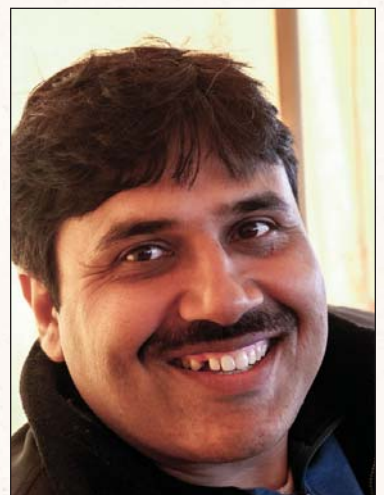
we are coming here to participate in another royal bath. We will be here for a fortnight or so, till the 17th. I, too, had a holy dip. Being a Hindu, it is impossible not to have a holy dip. I sipped some water and got sick, but I am OK now. Our clients are cautious that they do not do anything which is against the traditions. They get permission before they take any photographs. Many of these foreigners close their eyes

are in a spiritual world. We are Punjabis from Mumbai and train people in martial arts. The naga baba we just met called me Bruce Lee. He did not know my business but amazingly still connected me with martial arts.

We are living in times where the current system is failing, whereas this system has existed over six thousand years. The sadhus themselves are on the spiritual path and may not always have the answer. Now, as I am preparing to leave, I feel this is a place not for getting answers, but for generating more questions in our mind. As we interact with the

saints, we realize there is no one way of doing things.

I did not have a bath in Ganga. Maybe that is where I differ. I do not get the logic of why people would like to drink that water. Ganga water is polluted, and still hundreds of thousands of people are bathing in it and drinking it without falling sick. We are here to precisely understand what this faith and energy is all about.



Pankaj Kholi, 42, works for Indebo travel agency



# Capturing India's Divine Chaos

Photographers usually communicate through their lens, but this time our intrepid cameraman supplements pictures with words

BY THOMAS KELLY

**W**HEN HINDUISM TODAY ASKED ME TO PHOTOGRAPH THE 2013 Purna Kumbh Mela at Prayagraj (Allahabad), I didn't think twice. This will be my fourth time covering the Kumbh Mela, the others being Haridwar in 1998, Prayag in 2001 and Ujjain in 2004. And now a return to Prayag, confluence of the holy waters of the Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati rivers. Over a 50-day period 100 million pilgrims will come here from all over India—indeed, all over the world—to witness and internalize the holistic spirit of this timeless Himalayan tradition and to earn spiritual merit by taking cold dips in the holy waters. I am fortunate to be returning with veteran Kumbh Mela reporter Rajiv Malik.

Photographing the Kumbh Mela is like entering a magical mandala at ritual time. Within minutes of entering the grounds I am mesmerized by a sea of pilgrims flowing inexorably like a tsunami across the sprawling 5,000-acre makeshift city of tents. Their endurance and tolerance levels are beyond my comprehension. What can sustain such patience, other than their deep faith and gratitude at being at the Kumbh Mela? For most, this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to perform the sacred rituals here and take a dip in the holy waters. I know this: only their unhurried discipline, coupled with meticulously planned infrastructure and sophisticated crowd control, could possibly keep the rivers of people flowing so smoothly.

They carry minimal belongings—a blanket, several cooking pots, flour and a roti roller, stainless steel water glasses, an extra sari for women and dhoti for men, and the essential ritual objects: incense, matches and vermilion dye for offerings. All this fits into a well-worn canvas bag carried on the head. I stand still, the camera in video mode, as the pilgrims stream past my lens, the elderly tightly clutching the sari of a relative in front of them. What would happen if this human chain were broken and they were separated? How could they ever find each other again among all these millions?

Each morning at 5 am, after a much-appreciated cup of tea (thank you, Rajiv, for bringing the electric teakettle), I step out of our UP

Tourism tented colony and join the human wave of pilgrims. After a 45-minute walk, being blessed by an orange-colored Hanuman murti along the way, we arrive just before sunrise at Sangam, the confluence of rivers that makes Prayag the most auspicious of all four Kumbh Mela sites. Already thousands are standing hip deep in the cool waters, awaiting the sunrise. I've come to photograph them giving praise to that which gives us life—Surya, the Sun—hoping to capture that inner gaze, a meditative resting with their inner essence, free of the dharma of having to think about "Me and the Other." The faces are calm, hands cupped together holding water offerings, lips slightly parted while reciting personal mantras. The pilgrims appear suspended in peace, bathed by the golden-soft morning light. The visual poetry of this timeless moment conveys a sense of eternity.

Coming out of their meditation, they take a deep breath, many pinch their nostrils closed, some elderly couples join hands with their family members, and all submerge themselves into the great Mother Ganga-Yamuna-Saraswati. They rise from the water blessed.

In order to capture their inner gaze, their connection with their essence, I must be in the water, but not so close as to be intrusive. Using my 80mm to 200mm Canon lens, I focus gently and with precision, hoping my presence does not disturb this moment of grace. Nearby I notice boys trolling for coins with magnets tied to strings. Each of us has our purpose here, our task to perform.

## Saints and Sages

Historically, and still today, the Kumbh Mela is a convocation of the holy ones, and Rajiv is instrumental in bringing us into contact with them. Having chosen the spiritual path, these revered saints and sages skillfully and compassionately teach and provide for hundreds, even thousands, of followers. Patient and poised, the saints sit blessing pilgrims and meeting other saints in intense dialogue. I photograph them as unobtrusively as possible, eagerly listening to their instructive messages between clicks. It is a rare privilege to be in

such close contact with saints and sages who have spent a lifetime studying and thinking about how to help humans help themselves to live a fulfilling and spiritual life.

I have always been fascinated by the tyagi sadhus—the renunciators, those men and women who seek freedom from worldly life and from any consciousness of duality, of "Me and the Other." For over 25 years I have been photographing them at the melas, at Shivaratri in Benares and at the sacred grounds of Pashupatinath in my home country of Nepal. In their striving to attain freedom (moksha, liberation) they walk an unconventional path. Many perform penances that few of us will ever see. I search each day for these men and women. I find one who has been standing up without lying down for 15 years, others who have held their arm aloft until it atrophied, others who have taken a vow to only drink milk for life. Their goal is to sever their attachment to the body and focus on their inner devotion to God.

Photographing these remarkable souls requires proper greetings, courage, clear motivation, acceptance and an abundance of patience. Monetary offerings are appreciated by some, especially the naga sadhus. Before photographing them, I absorb their presence, watch their eyes and inwardly thank them for sharing an example of mind control over pain and suffering and for their continual striving to live a life in pursuit of freedom—a life which few of us, even those who wish, are able to emulate.

## Main Bathing Day: Mauni Amavashya, January 10, 2013

The entire press has been waiting for this day, the most auspicious day to take the dip in these sacred waters. We have been instructed to photograph the march from the towers erected a short distance back from Sangam, and to be there early. I leave our tent at 4:30 am, having already scouted out which tower would offer the best vantage point. When I arrive, the tower is packed with over fifty photographers and major filmmakers. Below us is a sea of 30 million pilgrims. With the first glimmerings of dawn, the pilgrims converge towards the sacred waters. As the Sun's rays spread over the mela grounds, the naga sadhus approach, eyes focused inwards. Hundreds of police, on horseback and on foot, clear the pilgrims away to make room for the procession. The tower is surrounded by the tsunami of pilgrims making way for the stream of nagas. I shoot a few more pictures; then with adrenaline at peak level, I descend to the open ground and run toward Sangam with other press photographers.



HARSH TRIVEDI

Whistles blow and the stream of nagas flows into Sangam. The confluence of three holy rivers has become a merging of four.

We must be dervishes, darting in and out of the procession. Photographers with small throw-away cameras have positioned themselves in the water, directly in front of the nagas, to capture their religious fervor. Photographers carrying high-end digital cameras get several shots, then turn away from the splashing water to save their expensive gear. I stand at an angle to the rush with my camera on continuous shooting mode. I capture a cascade of images, then quickly turn around and concentrate on the march back to the akharas. The nagas are raucous and ecstatic. I dart around, shooting scenes that will be etched on my mind for life. For the record, if you're a photographer and dare to enter the naga procession, take one camera body and lens and transform yourself into a Nataraja.

Packing up gear and saying goodbye to the UP Tourism staff is bittersweet: these professionals have generously allowed us to hold our accommodations longer than expected. We load our belonging onto rickshaws, knowing that exiting the crowded grounds by vehicle is impossible. We slowly make our way to a back exit road where the staff have arranged a private taxi. All the way to the Lucknow airport I ride with my eyes shut, watching the amazing event play back in my mind. Life is full of magical moments, and these moments and encounters are now embedded in my hard drive and soul. Thank you, HINDUISM TODAY, and all the extraordinary people who have allowed me to capture human beings at their best. Jai Ganga!







ALL PHOTOS: THOMAS KELLY

## Hanuman: Sangam's Ancient Guardian

**T**HE 18TH INCARNATION OF SHRI HARI, MIGHTY HANUMANJI, is undoubtedly one of the most popular characters in the *Ramayana*. Here at Prayag, He is worshiped in a unique resting position in a temple on the banks of Sangam.

Swami Ananda Giri is a disciple of Swami Narendra Giri, the 16th head of the Baghambari Peeth which has administrated the temple for the last 700 years—even during the Mughal period. Swami Ananda explains, "Hanuman is a very important Deity for us. He is treated as *kotwal*, the chief of security, of this Tirthraj Prayag. Any one who has a bath at Sangam must have darshan of Lord Hanuman. Then only is one's pilgrimage complete. The main attraction of this particular temple is that here He is in a lying-down posture, taking rest. It is believed that in Treta Yuga, when Lord Rama was going back to Ayodhya after defeating Ravana, Hanuman Ji stopped at this place to rest and recover from the injuries He had suffered in the war in Sri Lanka. Hanumanji found this place soothing, as all the three rivers flowed together here and the whole atmosphere was

serene. In fact, He laid down, determined to leave his body at such a holy place. He expressed this intention to Sita and sought permission to leave the body in Her divine presence. Sita started weeping and said that if Hanuman ever left this world then there would be no one to do the selfless service. All the great bhaktas or devotees of this world have one aim, and that is to get liberated from the cycle of birth and death. Hanumanji was born not to get liberated but to grant liberation. He served those who served Lord Rama. Sita applied sindur (orange-red powder) to the body of Hanuman and declared that as long as the name of Lord Rama is in this world, Hanuman will be immortal and always known."

.....  
**Worshipping the great bhaktar:** (right) Priests decorate the murti of Lord Hanuman; (above) devotees throng the courtyard outside the temple; passing security personnel receive blessings from the sacred flame after the worship





## The Chillum Question

Some of India's sadhus have long smoked marijuana and hashish. HINDUISM TODAY asks why.

**T**HE LEGAL STATUS OF CANNABIS—marijuana and its related products such as hashish—is evolving around the globe, with tough laws softening in some places. While it remains illegal in most nations, its restricted use is permitted in Italy, Germany, Russia, Spain, the Czech Republic and the Netherlands. Recently it has been legalized in Colorado and Washington and decriminalized in twelve other US states, ostensibly due to its proven medical uses. In India it is technically illegal, yet one can find it for sale at designated government-owned shops.

Western documentarians who cover the Kumbh almost always include a scene of sadhus smoking a chillum, a type of pipe, within the first few minutes. The recent *National Geographic* documentary on the Kumbh (which we do not recommend, because of this and other anti-Hindu stereotypes) managed it at the 60-second mark. In past Kumbh reports, HINDUISM TODAY has overlooked the matter, not wanting to criticize a long-standing practice among a group living austere lives, nor wanting to endorse what for the general population is regarded as a real menace. At this festival we decided to ask the saints and sadhus, chillum smokers and not, to explain.

What is smoked in the conical clay pipes is a varied mixture of *ganja* (marijuana flower and leaf), *charas* (a form of hashish handmade in India from the cannabis plant, which grows wild in the Himalayas) and tobacco. Smoking chillum is most common among the naga sadhus, those who go about naked at the Kumbh even in the coldest weather.

Sri Mahant Ganeshananda Saraswati of Taponidhi Shri Ananda Akhara, based in Nashik, explains, "Our naga sadhus have chillum as part of their sadhana, to keep their mind established in God and connect to the higher power. This is only one aspect of their life; presentation of it by the media in a flashy manner is not desirable."

Sthanapati Mahant Ghanashyam Giri points out, "On certain things our religion has no clear-cut directions. The tradition of chillum-smoking is one of them. Though I myself do not smoke chillum, I feel it may not be that bad. The purpose is to increase one's ability to focus and strengthen one's energy for meditation and penance. It is also supposed to reduce sexual desire. The

purpose has never been intoxication. It is OK—if you control it, rather than allowing the chillum to control you."

Digambar Amar Bhati, also known as Tyagi Baba, of the Mahanirvani Akhara, echoes Ghanashyam's view: "The traditional experience is that these natural herbs are helpful in concentration and meditation. These are not drugs, as such, but natural herbs. However, if one becomes addicted, even these herbs can be harmful to our health. I personally feel that the young sadhus should keep themselves away from all kinds of drug addiction."

Naga Baba Mahant Sawan Puri of Awahan Akhara explains, "People should understand that naga sadhus have chillum to connect to God and not as an addiction. This is allowed for them; but drug consumption is not appropriate for a householder, who can ruin his life through addiction."

Our reporting team did not observe any women sadhvis taking chillum in any of several visits to their camps. Sri Mahant Aradhana Giri, a woman saint of the Juna Akhara, shared her view. "I had a problem adjusting to the many swamis who had chillum. I myself do not take any kind of drugs and have just one meal a day. But chillum helps the young saints pass their entire

youth by directing their thoughts to higher consciousness."

Sri Mahant Divya Puri, head of the women's wing of the Juna Akhara, said the practice should end: "I do not think chillum is needed today, though it was needed or permitted in the past. It is, however, very difficult to bring changes in the many areas which need change."

Mahant Daya Shankar Puri of Juna Akhara finds it "unfortunate that in today's time neither the householders nor the sannyasins are abiding by the boundaries that religion has set for them. Chillum is OK for sadhus but should not be taken up by householders. I, too, have chillum. I can also certainly do without it. My own Guruji, who is older than I by ten years, does not even touch it, nor will anyone take it in his presence. For sadhus staying in seclusion, it keeps their brains peaceful and in control. Those who smoke chillum also have to realize it is a cause of lung disease. Everything, after all, has a limit."

Of those we interviewed, neither saints nor pilgrims condemned the long-standing practice. All opined that the tradition among sadhus does not give license to householders or youth to smoke chillum. A related practice among some sadhus of cigarette smoking may actually have a more deleterious impact on the youth. This habit is not only more addictive but meets with less discouragement from society, not carrying the same stigma as the chillum.

**Media rush:** Eight photographers, apparently all Westerners, eagerly snap a sadhu taking chillum during a break in the initiation ceremonies on the Ganga banks



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### CONGRESSWOMAN TULSI GABBARD (D-HI)

As the first Hindu American elected to Congress Rep. Gabbard will share her experiences as a lifelong public servant and describe how Hinduism has influenced her path.

DATE  
**Saturday,  
September 14, 2013**

TIME  
**5:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.**

LOCATION  
**India Community Center  
525 Los Coches St  
Milpitas, CA 95035**

RSVP  
<http://haf2013.eventbrite.com>

Like Rep. Gabbard, the HAF team is proud to be both American and Hindu. As the organization at the forefront of Hindu American advocacy, HAF provides a voice for the community by:

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- **Speaking up** about issues affecting Hindus.
- **Building relationships** with those who shape society's views and freedoms.

Come find out what we're all about! There is no cost to attend...all are welcome. We look forward to seeing you on September 14th!



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# Hindu Heritage Endowment

## AN ADVANCE HEALTH CARE DIRECTIVE SAVES FAMILY GRIEF

Sanjit Sharma had slipped into a coma from which, his doctors said, he would not awaken. His grieving family, however, had one great consolation: Sanjit had put down in writing what he wanted done in just this circumstance.

Rather than debating if and when to take their father or grandfather off life support—remember the Terri Schiavo case contentiously argued in the US Congress?—they referred his doctor to Sanjit’s advance health care directive.

“I already have that in my files,” the doctor told them. “Sanjit gave us a copy when he was in the hospital five years ago.” The family breathed a communal sigh of relief. They still had many issues to face, but Sanjit had lifted from their shoulders this delicate decision. Besides saving them from conflict at a time of great stress, he also saved his estate from the enormous expense of high-tech but, in his case, futile medical treatment.

The advance health care directive, also known as a durable power of attorney for health care, is a legal document, similar to a living will, that lets your physician, family and friends know your health care preferences, regarding the types of special treatment you want or don’t want at the end of life, your desire for diagnostic testing, surgical procedures, cardiopulmonary resuscitation and organ donation.

The Hindu belief in the rebirth and reincarnation of souls transforms death from a calamity to a natural process, a means by which the soul sheds one body and continues its evolution in another. But our technical ability to keep patients alive and the natural inclination to prolong the life of a loved one can create conflict among family members who are keeping vigil at the bedside.

By completing an advance health care directive, you, like Sanjit, can avoid having your family making crucial medical decisions for you at a time of emotional turmoil, and assure that your wishes are fulfilled.

Most US states have a form you can fill out to express your health care wishes. If you have Internet access, google “Hawaii Advance Health Care Directive” or “California Advance Health Care Directive (California Probate Code Sample Form).” Ideally, have an estate planning attorney guide you to make sure your wishes conform to both state and federal law. Your health care directive will allow you to make clear:

What is important to you when you are dying?

- do you especially want or not want certain medical treatments?
- do you prefer to be in a nursing home, a hospital or at home?
- what do you prefer regarding palliative care/pain management and hospice care?
- who is to make sure your wishes are carried out?

Keep your original signed form and give copies to the person you appoint as your agent and any alternates, your physician, family members, and the health care institution providing your care. And don’t rely on this brief article for authoritative guidance. Again, an estate planning attorney is your best resource.

For more information on estate planning and planned giving, visit the Hindu Heritage Endowment website at [www.hheonline.org](http://www.hheonline.org) and click on Planned Giving, then Essentials. Or call Shanmuganathaswami at 808-822-3012 extension 244. For an estate planning toolkit write to [hhe@hindu.org](mailto:hhe@hindu.org).



## JANUARY TO MARCH ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

<b>Kauai Aadheenam Monastic Endowment</b>				<b>Kauai Aadheenam Religious Art and Artifacts Fund</b>			
Anonymous	150.00	Rosa Jaramillo Osuna	35.00	Tamnash Gupta	108.00	Maruthu Pandian Darmalingam	60.00
Eleni Cannon	108.00	Anonymous	51.00	Hansmukh & Pratima Patel	500.00	Sasikumar Darmalingam	10.00
Roshan Harilela	375.00	Anuradha Venkatachalam	100.00	Total	659.00	Joel Knepp	101.00
Siva Jothiswary	100.00	Total	318.50			Subramaniam Pennathur	50.01
Gunasekaran Kandasamy	196.79					Ananthakumar Renganathan	300.00
Mira Das & R. Mahalingam	250.00	<b>Kauai Aadheenam Matavasi Medical Fund</b>	19.35	Rajadeva Alahan	153.00	Ganga Sivanathan	150.00
Other Donations	74,000.00	Kulagan Moonesawmy	600.00	Carmen Debora Murbach	6.00	Sivaruban & Nishiya Sivanesan	100.00
Total	75,179.79	Gowri Nadason	173.90	Michael Zimmermann	159.00	Andrew Stich	300.00
		Toshadevi Nataraj	140.00	Total		Soma Sundaram	5.00
		Anonymous	613.74			Total	2,753.48
		Aran Sambandar	162.00	<b>A. Saravanapavan Family Murugan Temple Pillaiyar Shrine Fund</b>			
		Barathy Sockanathan	48.27	Pathmini Saravanapavan	650.00	<b>Yogaswami Hindu Boys' Home Fund</b>	
		Vayudeva Varadan	54.00			Anonymous	474.00
		Other Donations	4,800.00	<b>Thank You Bodhinatha Fund</b>		Maruthu Pandian Darmalingam	60.00
		Total	6,611.26	Shreya & Seetha R. Aiyar	101.00	Sasikumar Darmalingam	20.00
				Hotranatha Ajaya	33.00	Canaganayagam Kugendra	60.00
		<b>Tirunavukkarasu Nayanar Gurukulam</b>		Anonymous	1,580.66	Total	614.00
		Anonymous	633.00	Amarnath & Latha Devarmanai	324.00		
		Michael R. Eisen	25.00	Gunasekaran Kandasamy	520.83	<b>Murugan Temple of North America Puja Fund</b>	
		Total	658.00	Thulasidas Nadarajah	75.00	Ken Kanagalingam	121.00
		<b>Sri Subramuniya Ashram Scholarship Fund</b>		Mano Navaratnarajah	150.00	Vayudeva Varadan	54.00
		Anonymous	324.00	Alex Ruberto	45.00	Total	175.00
				Aran Sambandar	162.00		
		<b>Sri Subramuniya Kottam Fund</b>		Anba Dayananden Valayten	12.57	<b>Rani Jothiswarar Memorial Fund</b>	
		Anonymous	900.00	Vayudeva Varadan	63.00	Kodisvara Jothiswarar	100.00
				Michael Wasyliw	648.00		
		<b>Kumbhalavalai Ganesha Temple Endowment</b>		Total	3,715.06		
		Mano Navaratnarajah	75.00	<b>Saivite Hindu Scriptural Fund for the Visually Impaired</b>		<b>Ramanathaswamy Temple Cleaning Fund</b>	
				Rajendra Giri	110.00	Danyse Crotti	100.00
		<b>Malaysia Hindu Renaissance Fund</b>		Alex Ruberto	60.00	Hiranya Gowda	99.00
		Anonymous	520.17	Total	170.00	Manogaran Mardemootoo	96.78
						Kulagan Moonesawmy	19.35
		<b>Hinduism Today Production Fund</b>				Toshadevi Nataraj	60.00
		Silvana Aliverti	100.00	<b>Sri Chandra Madhab Debnath Endowment</b>		Ganga Sivanathan	300.00
		Anonymous	4047.00	Shyamal Chandra Debnath	100.00	Total	675.13
		Raj Kumar Bhardwaj	50.00	<b>Murugan Temple Yalpanam Festival Fund</b>			
		Ron & Jennifer Burke	200.00	Pathmini Saravanapavan	650.00	<b>Cows of Kadavul and Iraivan Temples (Kovil Maadu) Endowment</b>	
		P.C. Ghosh	90.00			Anonymous	122.03
		C. Govind	600.38	<b>Taos Hanuman Fund</b>		Dharam & Madhu Bahl	54.00
		Hiranya Gowda	93.00	Sarma R. Kunda	100.00	Natraj Narayanswami	33.00
		Bramh D. Mishra	100.00	Elena Woodard	108.00	Toshadevi Nataraj	30.00
		Silvarajoo Muniandy	80.00	Total	208.00	Michael Zimmermann	6.00
		Subramaniam Pennathur	50.01			Total	245.03
		Sakuntalai Periasamy	30.48	<b>Kapaleeshwara Temple Orphanage</b>		<b>Pakistan Hindu Empowerment Fund</b>	
		Aran Sambandar	162.00	Savithri Sundaresan	108.00	Anil Kumar	27.00
		Deochan Sanichar	15.00	Michael Zimmermann	6.00		
		Ganga Sivanathan	516.00	Total	114.00	<b>Bharathi Yoga Dhama Fund</b>	
		Asan Tejwani	1,008.00			Michael R. Eisen	25.00
		Total	7,141.87	<b>Manjung Hindu Sabha Orphanage Fund</b>		Bruce & Martha Mitchell	108.00
				Rajendra Giri	110.00	Total	133.00
		<b>Hindu Orphanage Endowment Fund</b>		H.D. & Susheela Kishorenath	15.00	<b>Murugamoorthi Thirukkovil Endowment</b>	
		Roshan Harilela	375.00	Suhashini Muniandy	35.00	Anonymous	108.00
		Gunasekaran Kandasamy	196.79	Total	160.00		
		Anonymous	522.06	<b>Pazhassi Balamandiram Orphanage Fund</b>		<b>Panchangam Endowment Fund</b>	
		Alex Ruberto	75.00	Rajendra Giri	110.00	Thushyanthan Amirthalingam	25.00
		Rodney & Ilene Standen	30.00			Dolly Nyaneshwari Belas	25.00
		Matthew Wiczork	17.00	<b>Karnataka Temple Development Fund</b>		Anonymous	965.13
		Total	1,215.85	Hiranya Gowda	1,000.00	Rolf Karl Kern	25.00
				<b>Sri Ganesha Hindu Temple of Utah Endowment Fund</b>		Subrahmanyam Kuppa	25.00
		<b>Hindu Education Endowment</b>		Temple Devotees	5,000.00	Shipriya Mahesh	25.00
		Hasu N. & Hansa H. Patel	100.00			Raj & Deepa Maturi	25.00
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				Total	400.00	Viswanathan Subburaman	5.00
		<b>Hindu Press International Endowment Fund</b>				Soma Velayutham	2.00
		Hiranya Gowda	63.00	<b>Hinduism Today Complimentary Subscription Fund</b>		Anand & Srividya Yegnan	25.00
				Hiranya Gowda	153.00	Total	1,247.13
		<b>Loving Ganesha Distribution Fund</b>		Rajagopal Krishnan	60.00	<b>Insurance Premium</b>	
		Mano Navaratnarajah	225.00	Michael Zimmermann	6.00	Mrunal Patel	3,003.00
		Gassa Patten	1,350.00	Total	219.00		
		Total	1,575.00	<b>Kauai Aadheenam Yagam Fund</b>		<b>Kauai Aadheenam Renovation Endowment</b>	
				Victoria Lynne Johnson	3.00	Other Donations	600.00
		<b>Saiva Agamas Trust</b>					
		Ganga Sivanathan	210.00	<b>Yogaswami Hindu Girls' Home of Sittandy Endowment</b>			
				Anonymous	370.47		
		<b>Spiritual Park of Mauritius Endowment</b>		Jeri Arin	300.00		
		Anil Kumar	27.00	Sangamesh Bellad	50.00		
				Marlene Carter	162.00		
		<b>Positive Discipline Endowment</b>		Sunit Chacko	795.00		
		Tamnash Gupta	59.40				
		<b>Tirumular Sannidhi Preservation Fund</b>					
		Murali Krishnaswamy	250.00				
		<b>Hindu Heritage Endowment Administrative Fund</b>					
		Kiran Davane	51.00				

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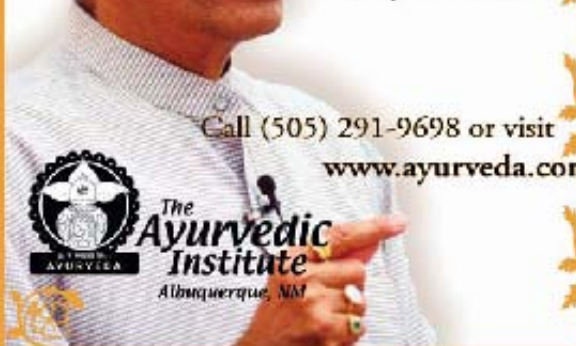
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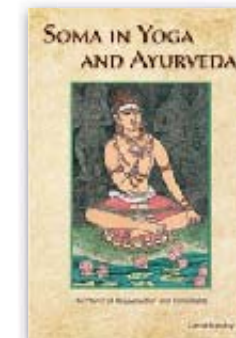
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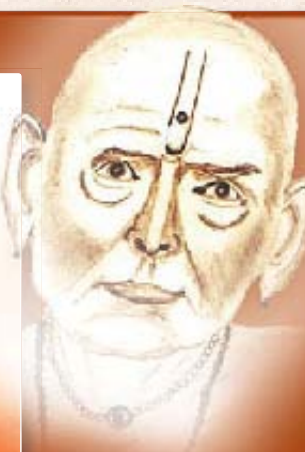
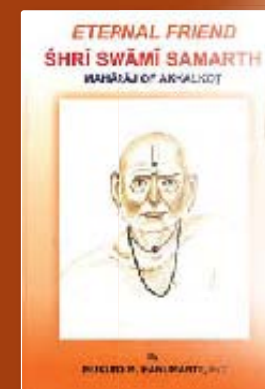
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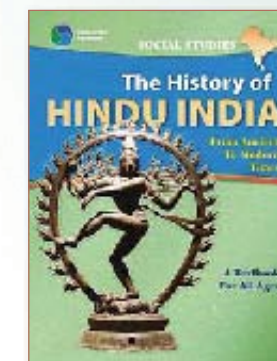
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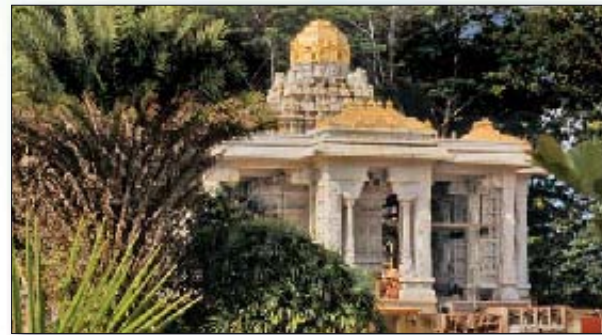
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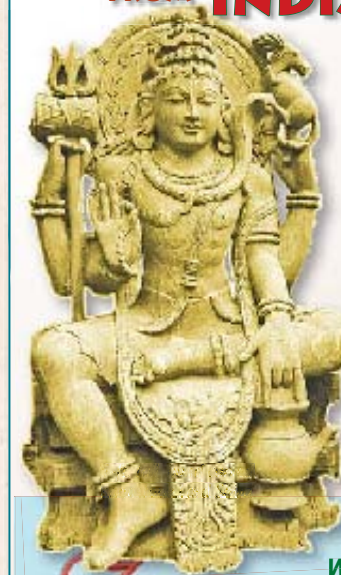
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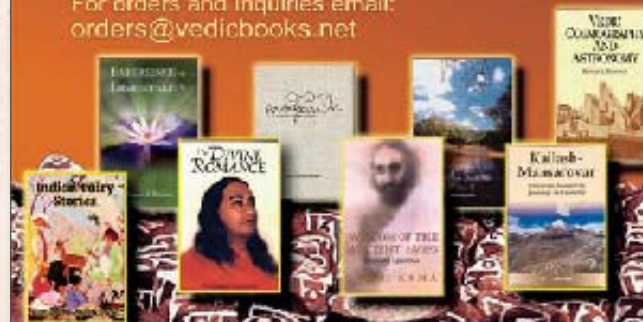
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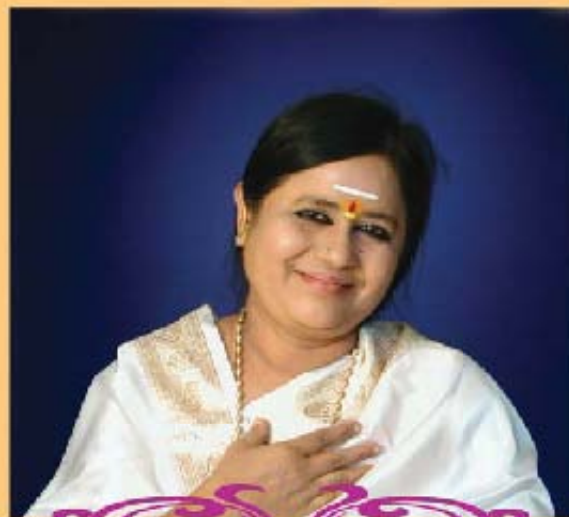
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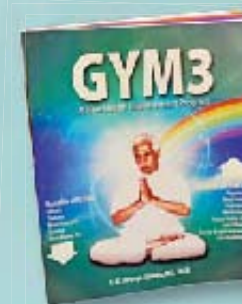


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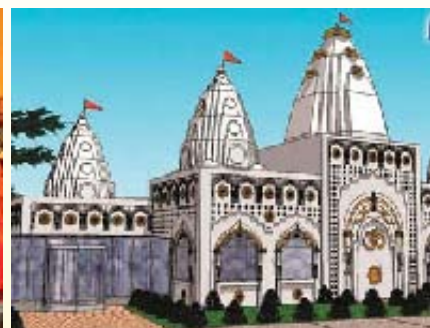
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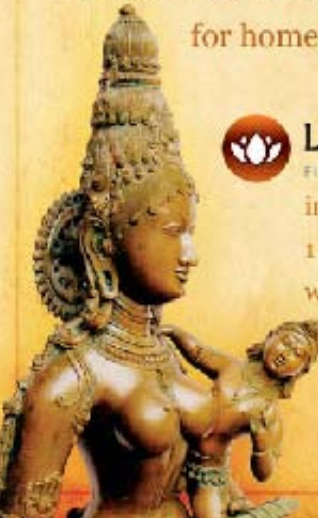


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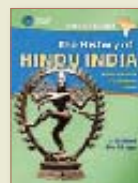
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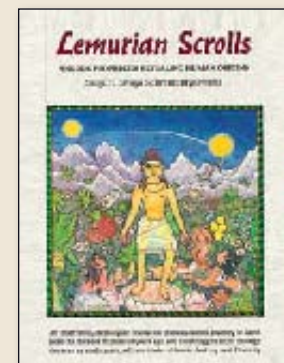
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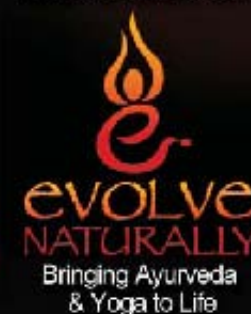
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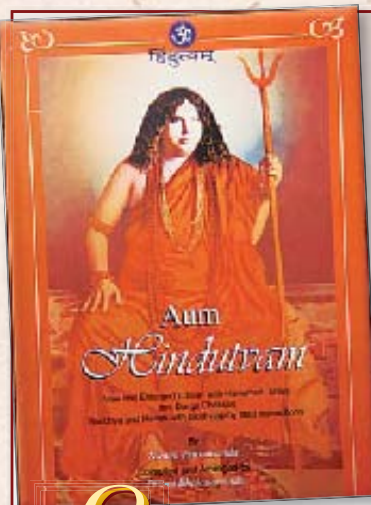


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Starting with the earliest migrations into India from Africa 70,000 years ago, Part 1 goes on to explore the ancient Indus Valley civilization. Wood unfortunately mentions the now widely discredited Aryan migration theory; but this may be forgiven, considering the overall quality and good taste of the show.

Parts 2, 3 and 4 take us from the 5th century BCE up to Muslim times, covering the country's renowned kingdoms and global commerce. Wood discusses India's early achievements, such as its ancient religious traditions and rituals, its unmatched architecture, temples and bronze work, and its mathematics, which originated the concept of zero and accurately calculated the circumference of the Earth. Finally, parts 5 and 6 take us through the Muslim era and British colonialism to the Independence movement and India's ultimate freedom in 1947, including interviews with participants.

What makes the series charming is the fact that Wood traveled all over India to make it. We see him exploring the magnificent cities of the Gangetic plain and the ancient Tamil culture of the South, examining ancient manuscripts and documents from the archives of the British East India Company, visiting historical sites and speaking with local people. Throughout the series

he attempts to give audiences—particularly those in the West—a glimpse of India's greatness and some insight into the diversity of its peoples, cultures and landscapes.

As Wood explores Tamil Nadu, he explains that Tamil culture is 3,500 years old, like that of ancient Greece or Rome. An interview by *The Hindu* highlights his admiration for Tamil culture: “Tamil is the last living classical Indian language. The first surviving work in Tamil, a 300-BCE book on linguistics, refers to an already existing culture. Tamil is older than any modern European language. I remind Western-centric audiences, who implicitly assume the superiority of Western modes of thought, that Tamil has a literature comparable to any in the West. It makes

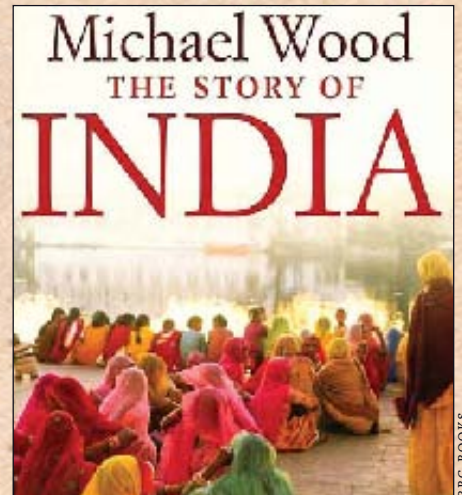


viewers sit up and question their assumptions.”

In the documentary, Wood states, “Now, in the era of globalization, India has once again become a leading player in the world. Home to more than one billion people, it is a land of amazing contrasts: it contains both the high-tech brilliance of Bangalore's Silicon Valley and the archaic splendor of the Kumbha Mela festival, where 25 million pilgrims come to bathe in the sacred river Ganges on a single night. While moving at high speed into the 3rd millennium, India alone, of all the civilizations on the face of the earth, is still in touch with her ancient past.”

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